

Kierkegaard Studies · Monograph Series 5

Niels Nymann Eriksen

# Kierkegaard's Category of Repetition

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Kierkegaard Studies  
Monograph Series

5

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Edited on behalf of the  
Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre  
by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Hermann Deuser

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Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Jon Stewart

Walter de Gruyter · Berlin · New York  
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A Reconstruction

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## Abbreviations

(For full references see the Bibliography)

- BT*      Martin Heidegger *Being and Time*.  
*JP*      Søren Kierkegaard's *Journals and Papers*, vol. 1-7.  
*KSA*      Friederich Nietzsche *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Einzelbänden*.  
*KW*      Kierkegaard's *Writings*, vol. I-XXV.  
*Pap.*      Søren Kierkegaards *Papirer*, vol. I-XVI.  
*SKS*      Søren Kierkegaards *Skrifter*, vol. 1-4.  
*SV3*      Søren Kierkegaards *Samlede værker*, 3rd edition, vol. 1-20.  
*SZ*      Martin Heidegger *Sein und Zeit*.

Quotations from Kierkegaard's published works are given with references both to the Danish text and to the English translation in the edition from Princeton University Press (*KW*). For the works before 1845, the Danish text referred to is the new scholarly edition, *Søren Kierkegaard's Skrifter* (*SKS*). References to later works are given to the third Danish edition, *Søren Kierkegaard's Samlede værker* (*SV3*). Quotations from Kierkegaard's journals are given with reference to the standard Danish edition, *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer* (*Pap.*), and to Howard V. and Edna H. Hong's compilation *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers* (*JP*). My English renderings sometimes differ considerably from the standard translation I give reference to. With few exceptions I have also quoted other Danish and German writers in English translation, but usually with reference to the original.



## Introduction

In the opening paragraph of *Repetition* Constantin Constantius, the pseudonymous author of that book, predicts that some day when modern thought has escaped the hegemony of Greek philosophy, the category of repetition will form the basis of a new philosophy. 'For', he writes, '*repetition* is the decisive expression for what "recollection" was for the Greeks. Just as they taught that all knowing was a matter of recollecting, so the new philosophy will teach that the entire life is a repetition'.<sup>1</sup> Later, he substantiates this claim:

If one does not have the category of recollection or of repetition, all life dissolves into an empty, meaningless noise. Recollection is the ethnical [i.e. pagan or Greek] view on life, repetition the modern; repetition is the *interest* [*Interesse*] of metaphysics, and also the interest upon which metaphysics gets stranded. (SKS 4, 25 / KW VI, 149)

Constantius thus distinguishes recollection and repetition as paradigms of thought corresponding to antiquity and modernity. The aim of this study is to analyse and explore Kierkegaard's category of repetition on the basis of this distinction.

The notion of repetition has been taken up at decisive moments in the development of twentieth century thought. Heidegger's conception of historicity in *Being and Time* (1927), for example, involves a notion of repetition that, despite a lack of recognition, seems to owe more to Kierkegaard than to anybody else.<sup>2</sup> Gilles Deleuze opens his magisterial work *Difference and Repetition* (1968) with an analysis of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche as the two first thinkers to introduce repetition as 'the fundamental category of a philosophy of the future'.<sup>3</sup> And in his thought-provoking account of the relationship between Heidegger's hermeneutical project to Derrida's deconstruction,

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<sup>1</sup> SKS 4, 9 / KW VI, 131.

<sup>2</sup> BT, 437f / SZ, 385f.

<sup>3</sup> Deleuze, Gilles *Difference and Repetition*, tr. by Paul Patton, The Athlone Press, London 1994, p. 5.

John D. Caputo takes his point of departure in Kierkegaardian repetition as 'the first "post-modern" attempt to come to grips with the flux'.<sup>4</sup> Not to mention Freud, whose conception of repetition as 'a way of remembering' forms an interesting contrast to Constantius' category, even if it was coined independently of Kierkegaard's thought.<sup>5</sup>

If the category of repetition, first introduced by Constantius in 1843, thus has demonstrated an exceptional vitality in the subsequent development of European thought, it nevertheless remains one of the most obscure elements of the Kierkegaardian corpus. George Steiner expresses the resignation of many Kierkegaard readers in this respect when he calls *Repetition* an 'enigmatic but probably decisive treatise'.<sup>6</sup> The difficulty is not due to the conceptual complexity of this category, but, on the contrary, to an evident lack of conceptuality. For though *Repetition* contains extraordinary philosophical claims, it is also a teasing literary work that does not easily lend itself to the categories of philosophy and theology. This elusiveness, however, is itself grounded in the nature of the category Constantius introduces. For repetition is not so much a *philosophical doctrine* as it is a *paradigm of thought*, and as such it is something that cannot be grasped as an object for thought. A reader who would want to grasp repetition as a fully developed philosophical doctrine would be like a curious spectator who would investigate in detail the patterns of a 'magic eye' hologram. Not only would he prove unable to see the lacking dimension in that way; his very effort of seeing would engender his blindness.

The task of interpreting *Repetition*, then, is not so much that of providing a systematic account of the original meaning of Constantius' category as to 'reconstruct' this category in light of the subsequent developments both in Kierkegaard's own work and in European thought.

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<sup>4</sup> Caputo, John D. *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis 1987, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. in his essay 'Recollection, Repetition, and Working Through' (1914) in *Collected Papers*, tr. by Joan Riviere, London 1971, pp. 366-376. Cf. the note on Freud in Chapter One of this study.

<sup>6</sup> George Steiner 'The Wound of Negativity: Two Kierkegaard Texts' in *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, Rée, Jonathan & Chamberlain, Jane (eds.), Oxford 1998, p. 104.

## *The Twofold Task of Reconstruction*

The subtitle, 'a reconstruction', thus implies that the aim of this study is not merely to restate what Constantius and Kierkegaard once wrote about repetition; rather, this category must be constructed anew, partly on the basis of an understanding of the nature of Kierkegaard's work as a whole, and partly in light of the development in European thought since Kierkegaard, especially the thematization of nihilism in Nietzsche and Heidegger.

### *1. Reconstruction on the Basis of an Understanding of Kierkegaard's Authorship as a Whole*

*Repetition* belongs to the early part of Kierkegaard's production. Three stages of his use of the notion of repetition can be distinguished. (1) In a fragment from 1842 or 1843 entitled *Johannes Climacus or De Omnibus Dubitandum Est*, Kierkegaard first proposed repetition as a way out of the crisis of modern philosophy. However, the fragment ends abruptly, and the notion of repetition advanced in it still seems to be modelled on Hegel's notion of mediation.<sup>7</sup> (2) The

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<sup>7</sup> Part One of *Johannes Climacus or De Omnibus Dubitandum Est* (Pap. IV B 1 / KW VII, suppl., pp. 113-172) tells the tragic story a young man, Johannes, who tries to make the principle of doubt the principle for his life. It soon turns out, however, that it was impossible to 'do what the philosophers said'. Having experienced the fatal consequences of a philosophy grounded on the principle of doubt, Johannes instead, in *Part Two*, seeks 'the ideal possibility of doubt in consciousness' (145 / 166). It is on the last two pages of this fragmentary second part of the work that the notion of repetition is introduced as the necessary condition for the overcoming of doubt. The argument proceeds in three steps.

(1) For consciousness to be capable of doubt, the question of truth must be an issue for it. But truth becomes an issue only through the consciousness of untruth. 'In the question of truth, consciousness is brought into relation with something other, and what makes this relation possible is untruth.' As long as a human being lives in immediacy, actuality is simple reality [*Realiter*], and doubt is impossible. By presupposing simple reality, however, language negates it as something immediate. Language thus negates immediacy by expressing it.

(2) Johannes defines consciousness in terms of this contradiction between ideality (word) and reality, mediacy and immediacy as a *being-between* [*Interesse*]. The ideal possibility of doubt lies in this 'interest'. Its determinations are therefore *trichotomous*, since consciousness not only expresses the contradiction but embodies it, and thus itself becomes the third member. The determinations of reflection, by contrast, are only *dichotomous*; remaining itself without being-between (*interesse*), reflection expresses the conflict without embodying it. All knowledge which belongs to the realm of reflection (e.g. aesthetics and metaphysics) is therefore only



decisive coinage takes place in *Repetition* (1843). Kierkegaard wrote most of this book in Berlin between the 11th and 25th of May 1843 in a state of overpowering inspiration following the break with his fiancée Regine Olsen. It was completed during the months following his return to Copenhagen under impression of Regine's engagement to Frederik Schlegel. (3) From the end of 1843 or the beginning of 1844 a series of lucid journal entries concerning repetition survives, about sixty manuscript pages altogether. They were drafts of a never published 'Public Letter' to Prof. J.L. Heiberg in response to his critique of Constantius' book. We shall later consider some of these texts in detail.

Like many of the central concepts in Kierkegaard's writings, the

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the precondition of doubt. Modern philosophy has thus been misled by its ignorance about the nature of doubt to assume that it could overcome doubt objectively by systematic thinking. The ancient sceptics demonstrated a profounder insight when they tried to overcome doubt by turning the interest into apathy (148f / 170).

(3) As long as the individual lives in reflection, his life is carried by the confidence that 'ideality and reality innocently communicate with each other'. Consciousness, rightly so called, only comes into being when ideality and reality collide. This takes place in the phenomenon of repetition. In reality there is not repetition, since it is momentary. 'If the world...were nothing but equally large unvariegated boulders, there would still be no repetition...in every moment, I would see a boulder, but there would be no question as to whether it was the same one I had seen before.' (149 / 171) Similarly, there would be no repetition in ideality alone. Only when ideality and reality touch each other does repetition occur; but this coming together of ideality and reality was exactly the definition of consciousness. This repetition in consciousness is recollection in which something ideal (a past event) is identified with something present. The text ends abruptly after this very concise introduction of the category of repetition.

Jon Stewart has shown that the argument in Part Two of *Johannes Climacus* is structured on the section on 'Sense Certainty' in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The conflict between ideality and reality in this fragment corresponds, he argues, at least in part, to the opposition between universality and particularity in that section. This opposition '*kann als die erkenntnistheoretische Grundlage für den Wiederholungsbegriff angesehen werden, eine Grundlage, die Kierkegaard zum grossen Teil von Hegel übernommen hat*' (Jon Stewart 'Hegel als Quelle für Kierkegaards Wiederholungsbegriff' in *Kierkegaard Studies. Yearbook 1998*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin / New York, pp. 302-317). While Kierkegaard's dependence on Hegel in this particular text has hereby been demonstrated, it does not follow that a similar dependence can be traced in Kierkegaard's subsequent conception. The fact that Kierkegaard in this fragment equates repetition and recollection indicates that this concept of repetition cannot be identified with that of his later, published writings. The defining characteristic of that conception is precisely its opposition to recollection. One cannot help thinking, however, that the abrupt ending of the text marks a critical point in the genesis of the Kierkegaardian concept of repetition.

notion of repetition has a relatively brief life. From 1844 on this notion is overshadowed by other key notions, such as the moment of vision [*Øieblikket*], and the paradox.<sup>8</sup> The fact that ‘repetition’ only for a brief period seems to have expressed the essential issue for Kierkegaard can be interpreted in two ways. (1) If Kierkegaard is considered a thinker in Heidegger’s sense of the word, that is, a person who represents one essential thought, then the stages of his development must be understood as stages in a process of clarification. Kierkegaard, according to this view, gave up ‘repetition’ because he came to consider ‘the moment’ or ‘the paradox’ to be more fitting categories for his one essential thought.<sup>9</sup> But there is nothing in Kierkegaard’s subsequent writings that necessitates the view that he came to regard the category of repetition as something of the past. It is also far from obvious that the Kierkegaardian corpus fits the pattern of ‘a thinker’ in this sense; not because there is a lack of essential unity in the authorship, but because the unity is of a different kind. (2) If, instead of considering Kierkegaard a metaphysical thinker, we see him as a religious writer, the development within his work takes on a different meaning. Kierkegaard himself indicates that this is how he wants to be understood when, in *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* (1848, published posthumously), he sums up his project as follows: ‘My entire work as an author relates to Christianity, to the problem of becoming a Christian’.<sup>10</sup> The task that unites the Kierkegaardian corpus as a whole is not that of *thinking* one essential thought, but of *becoming* a Christian. This, of course, does not mean that the problem of becoming a Christian is Kierkegaard’s essential thought (that would make him a theological thinker). Kierkegaard is not a thinker

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<sup>8</sup> In *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844) the notion of repetition is already relegated to the state of footnotes, though important ones (SKS 4, 324-327 & 393 / KW VIII, 17-19 & 90), and in *Philosophical Fragments* (1844) it is hardly mentioned, even though the project of this book is in some ways similar to that of *Repetition*. The category of repetition is alluded to in a number of passages in Kierkegaard’s later writings, even if it never again occupied the decisive place as it did in 1843: *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions* (1845, SKS 5, 432-434 & 302-305 / KW X, 57-59 & 78-81), *Stages on Life’s Way* (1845, SV3 8, 203 / KW XI, 402), *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846, SV3 9, 78, 217-224 & 243 / KW XII, 1, 91, 259-267 & 288-289), *Two Ages* (1846, SV3 14, 17-30 / KW XIV, 14-30), *Works of Love* (1847, SV3 12, 366-367 / KW XVI, 385-386).

<sup>9</sup> This is the view taken by Michael Theunissen in ‘ὁ αἰτῶν λαμβάνει. Der Gebetsglaube Jesu und die Zeitlichkeit des Christseins’ in *Negative Theologie der Zeit*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1991, pp. 346-352.

<sup>10</sup> SV3 18, 81 / KW XXII, 23.

who is concerned with religious issues, but a writer whose thinking is a religious quest. 'Becoming a Christian' is therefore not the essential *thought*, but the basic *task* embodied in Kierkegaard's writings. Heidegger was right: 'Kierkegaard is not a thinker, but a religious writer, and indeed not just one among others, but the only one in accord with the destining belonging to his age.'<sup>11</sup>

The unity of the authorship, therefore, is not grounded in the unity of one basic thought, but in its character of response to one persistent calling. From this perspective it becomes clear that his final attack on the church is the culmination of his work and not, as scholars have sometimes indicated, an appendix to it. Kierkegaard's final position is captured in his words: 'I am not a Christian.'<sup>12</sup> 'Anyone who wants to understand my very special task,' Kierkegaard wrote in 1855, 'must concentrate on holding this [statement] firm.' But what is the meaning of this dictum? Is Kierkegaard playing himself out against the self-indulgent state Christianity? Or is he saying that Christianity is not 'true'? No, these words go far deeper than that. Understood in its context, this assertion is, perhaps, the most powerful counter-movement to European nihilism. It captures Kierkegaard's fundamental religious position as succinctly as Nietzsche's position is captured by his dictum 'God is dead'. As in the case of Nietzsche's words, Kierkegaard's statement does not express a simple 'fact', but a self-interpretation in which the truth of his age is revealed. He is not passing judgement on Christianity, but on himself and, by implication, on his age. That his assertion is uniquely connected to the modern Christian world appears from his claim that 'in the eighteen hundred years of Christendom there is nothing comparable, nothing analogous to my task; this is in "Christendom" for the first time'.<sup>13</sup> Only Socrates' ignorance is analogous to his claim not to be a Christian; for as Socrates' ignorance concerning the nature of his own being implied an elevation of being human over against the intellectualism of the sophists, so for Kierkegaard the claim not to be a Christian is an elevation, a *revaluation* of being a Christian.

This understanding of Kierkegaard as a religious writer must determine our view of the development of his work. Instead of reading the authorship as process in which one basic thought comes into light, we

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<sup>11</sup> 'The Word of Nietzsche: "God is Dead"' in Martin Heidegger *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, tr. by William Lovitt, New York 1977, p. 94.

<sup>12</sup> E.g. SV3 19, 318-324 / KW XXIII, 340-347.

<sup>13</sup> SV3 19, 322 / KW XIII, 344.

read it as a progression towards religious self-surrender. The stages of this development are not merely stages in a process of clarification, but they are also stages of a transition from the pursuit of philosophy and aesthetics to religious proclamation. The category of repetition, therefore, cannot be grasped in isolation from Kierkegaard's other writings. Rather it must be qualified by the understanding of Kierkegaard as a religious writer, and in this perspective it must be reconstructed against the background of the corpus as a whole.

## *2. Reconstruction on the Basis of the Thematization of Nihilism in Nietzsche and Heidegger*

But if Kierkegaard is a religious writer rather than a metaphysical thinker, he certainly breaks the boundaries of that tradition of writing. For while most religious writers in the West have tacitly assumed the dichotomies of traditional metaphysics as a basis for their message, this assumption is challenged in Kierkegaard. As a religious writer, he is cut off from his roots by the event of nihilism. However, unlike Nietzsche, the attack on the dichotomies of metaphysics is not turned against Christianity; it rather arises from within Christianity itself. To anticipate: Kierkegaard turns the Christian teaching of the incarnation against metaphysics; the 'historicizing of the eternal'<sup>14</sup> in the incarnation thus becomes a paradigm for post-metaphysical thinking rather than a metaphysical doctrine in a traditional sense.

The event of nihilism, I shall argue, is a fundamental presupposition of Kierkegaard's work, even if it is never clearly thematized as such. In the generation following Kierkegaard, Nietzsche brought nihilism into light as the fundamental characteristic of his age; and in this century Heidegger attempted in his confrontation with Nietzsche 'to point the way toward the place from which it may be possible some day to ask the question concerning the essence of nihilism'.<sup>15</sup> In approaching Kierkegaard we must take this subsequent thematization of nihilism into account.

What, then, is the meaning of nihilism according to Nietzsche and Heidegger? The event of nihilism results from the partition of reality into the sensory and the suprasensory in Platonic metaphysics. This division implies that the value and meaning of the sensory is hereby placed in the realm of the suprasensory. However, the more the su-

<sup>14</sup> Climacus' expression (*SKS* 4, 263 / *KW* VII, 61).

<sup>15</sup> Heidegger, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

prasensory is elevated over the sensory, the more distant, inaccessible, *irrelevant*, it becomes. In the end, we can no longer reach the sphere in which we have placed our highest values. The value and meaning of our lives is deposited in a world that turns out to be valueless. And thus, in Nietzsche's phrase, '*the highest values devalue themselves*.'<sup>16</sup>

Nihilism is therefore neither a phenomenon of decay nor a danger inherent to metaphysical thinking; it is the very essence of metaphysics and, in Heidegger's phrase, 'the "inner logic" of Western history'.<sup>17</sup> When Nietzsche's madman proclaimed the death of God, he pronounced 'the word that always, within the metaphysically determined history of the West, is already spoken by implication'.<sup>18</sup>

By demonstrating nihilism as the essence of metaphysics, Nietzsche turns metaphysics upside down. The realm of the suprasensory which previously assured the value of the sensory is now transformed into an unstable product of the sensory. The truth of the sensory is asserted over against the illusion of the suprasensory. But this inversion of metaphysics is itself nihilistic, for when the value of the sensory is no longer understood from the suprasensory, it loses its meaning as sensory. The attempt to escape the dichotomies of metaphysics by inverting it does not lead to an affirmation of the sensory; rather it culminates in a neither-nor, in a sense of meaninglessness. 'The aim is lacking; "Why?" finds no answer'.<sup>19</sup> The very essence of metaphysics thus comes to light in the nihilistic sentiment of modernity.

It is in the light of this insight we approach Kierkegaard's writings on repetition. The point is not that Kierkegaard introduced repetition in response to a clearly perceived conception of nihilism. Rather, we see Kierkegaard as embodying the nihilistic sentiment of his age, and as responding to it without being in a position to thematize it clearly.<sup>20</sup> If for no other reason, this approach would perhaps be justified by the influence his writings have had on existentialism. However, in the case of Kierkegaard's category of repetition there is another, more important, reason why it must be reconstructed on the basis of the thematization of nihilism. For the very *meaning* of repetition presupposes the breakdown of the dualisms of traditional meta-

<sup>16</sup> *The Will to Power*, tr. by Kaufmann & Hollingdale, New York 1968, § 2.

<sup>17</sup> Heidegger, op. cit. p. 67.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>19</sup> Nietzsche, loc. cit.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Michael Theunissen's interpretation of Kierkegaard's concept of despair against the background of the event of nihilism in *Der Begriff Verzweiflung: Korrekturen an Kierkegaard*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1993, pp. 65-70.

physics. This becomes clear when we consider this notion in the context of the history of philosophical anthropology.

The development of the understanding of the self in a European context can be seen as falling roughly into three stages.<sup>21</sup> Antiquity and the Middle Ages were dominated by a metaphysical view of the self. This view rested on the twofold assumption that there is a shared, trans-individual determination for human beings, and that the individual is in some sense predisposed towards the realisation of this determination. Renaissance individualism marks the beginning of a new epoch in which the determination of human being is seen as the unfolding of individuality. This epoch shares with Antiquity and the Middle Ages the assumption that the individual is somehow predetermined to fulfill his goal, but it denies the universal character of this goal. Self-realisation is no longer a realisation of the universal, but the externalization of some inner core of individuality. With the coming of nihilism, the distinction between inner and outer is made problematic, and thus the conviction that there is an inner, binding core of individuality is shattered. In the third epoch the project of unfolding individuality is therefore replaced by that of becoming an individual or a self. This project is captured in Nietzsche's autobiographical motto: *'Wie man wird was man ist.'* In contrast to the earlier optimistic faith in the human disposition towards the truth of our own being, this view assumes that human beings are almost always escaping what they really are, and that even the various projects of self-realisation are just such escapes. The self is no longer a fact from which we can proceed, but a goal that lies ahead, something we must become. Self-realisation has become a matter of self-appropriation and self-coincidence.

It is at this final stage that the meaning of repetition comes to light. For what does it mean to become what one is? How can what one becomes be what one already is? What kind of becoming is this? This is a kind of becoming in which the end point coincides with the starting point, and yet remains distinct from it *as* an end point. The notions of self-appropriation and self-coincidence thus point to a moment in which *nothing new is added to the old, but the old has become new.* Such an event is a repetition in the Kierkegaardian sense of the word.

In everyday language 'repetition' denotes the occurrence of similar cases in a temporal succession. We call, for instance, the rising of the

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Michael Theunissen, op. cit., pp. 42-44.

sun a repetition because this movement seems to be the same every day, ignoring the fact that today is distinct from yesterday and that the rise of the sun is qualified by this difference. In the stricter sense of the word, repetition never takes place when elements within a totality recur, but only when the totality itself recurs. Repetition in the proper sense, therefore, does not allow for a spectator, for it only happens to the whole, to a totality, a world, consciousness. The essence of repetition, therefore, is expressed in the Christological phrase, 'the old has passed away, behold, everything has become new' (2 Cor 5: 17, cf. Rev 21: 5).

Let me sum up: As long as the self is understood metaphysically, on the basis of the distinction between the inner and the outer, self-realisation is a matter of remaining outwardly faithful to the inner world of memories and ideas; recollection is thus the domain of self-hood. In nihilism, however, this distinction becomes untenable. Since, accordingly, the central human task is no longer to realise oneself, but to become what one is, repetition, rather than recollection, is the proper domain of selfhood. In this sense, the transition from recollection to repetition ensues from nihilism.

I have outlined the two tasks implied by the subtitle, but it remains to be shown how the two aspects of the reconstruction combine. How can nihilism provide the basis on which a religious writer can be understood? Does not nihilism, according to its very essence, exclude religiousness? The proposed reconstruction makes sense only in so far as Kierkegaard is seen as embodying and proclaiming a kind of religious faith that not only survives nihilism, but which is somehow rooted in the nihilistic sentiment; a religiousness that is not dissolved in nihilism, but in which nihilism appears as a meaningful event.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, the comparison of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche does not aim at distinguishing two basic philosophical positions, but at catching a glimpse of the difference between a philosophical and a religious attitude to nihilism.

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<sup>22</sup> In this respect my project is inspired by, though not coincident with, George Pattison's attempt to interpret the experience of nothingness, not as 'a cipher of the death of God that surreptitiously advances a metaphysics of a subjective kind, but [as] a place of revelation – a place where truth is revealed to the subject, not decided by it' (*Agnosis: Theology in the Void*, Macmillan Press & St. Martin's Press, London & New York 1996, p. 84, cf. my review of this book in *Kierkegaardiana* 19 (1998) pp. 167-170).

## *The Three Guiding Questions*

So far, the task of reconstruction has been dictated from outside the texts concerning repetition, partly from the rest of Kierkegaard's writings, and partly from the thematization of nihilism. But there are also internal criteria for such an interpretation. In order to avoid our understanding of repetition only reflecting the issues of the wider context in which we see it, the reconstruction must be guided by questions that reflect Constantius' basic claims concerning repetition. We must mark in a preliminary way the direction in which the texts on repetition take us, and thus, as it were, adjust the compass before we set out.

Constantius' claims concerning repetition can, roughly speaking, be summed up in the three claims (1) that repetition is a category of authentic historicity, (2) that authentic historicity consists in a 'happy' relation to the other, and (3) that in this conception of repetition lies a solution to the ancient conflict between being and becoming. Each of these three claims is an avenue by which the meaning of Kierkegaard's distinction between repetition and recollection can be approached. The projected reconstruction of Kierkegaard's notion of repetition must oscillate between the three sets of questions implicit in these claims in order to see how they unite in his conception of repetition. These guiding questions must now be considered in a preliminary way.

### *1. The Question of Historicity*

The question of historicity arises from the fact that a human being is, on the one hand, determined by his past and, on the other hand, is continually transcending this determination by relating to it and by projecting himself into the future. From this double determination a conflict ensues between what a person is because of the past and what he is because of his relation to the future. The conflict arises from the fact that as existing individuals we are continually engaged in a process of self-interpretation and understanding. In this process we look to the past, turning our backs on the future, and thus we start 'living backwards'. In a journal entry from 1843 Kierkegaard writes:

Philosophy is perfectly right in saying that life must be understood backwards. But then one forgets the other clause – that it must be lived forwards. The more one thinks through this clause, the more one concludes that life in temporality never becomes properly understandable, simply because never at any time does one get perfect repose to take the stance: backwards. (*Pap. IV A 164 / JP 1030*)



The conflict between 'living' and understanding does not result from some inability on the part of understanding (as if 'life' were beyond reason merely in the sense that reason lacks the power to grasp it); rather, it arises from the opposition between the directedness of the understanding self and that of the 'living' self. Understanding means 'living' backwards; and yet, without understanding, 'life' dissolves into a natural process.

According to Constantius, there are two possible ways of coming to grips with this problem of historicity: recollection and repetition. Recollection solves the conflict between 'living' and understanding by sublating 'living' into understanding. Since a person understands himself in recollection as being rooted in the realm of Being or the eternal, the truth of his life lies within him or behind him, in the origin of his being. He reaches this truth when he turns away from the temporal, multifarious world in order to concentrate on the task of knowing himself. Though Western philosophy had given up the mythical parts of Plato's doctrine of *anamnesis* it still, according to Constantius, remained within the paradigm of recollection; the true life is consequently apprehended as backwards living.

In modernity, however, the conflict between 'living' and understanding becomes critical, the unity of thought and being can no longer be assumed, and thus the need for a new paradigm of thought is felt. *Repetition* is more than anything else a book about this essentially modern conflict between 'living' and understanding. If life is not to be 'without salt and meaning' for modern man, Constantius argues, repetition must replace recollection as the category of historicity. Repetition thus gives an answer to the question of historicity that is opposite to that given by recollection. If in recollection living was sublating into understanding, in repetition understanding is sublating into living. Constantius writes in the opening paragraph:

Repetition and recollection are the same movement, except in opposite directions, for what is recollected has been, is repeated backwards, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forward. Repetition, therefore, if it is possible, makes a person happy, whereas recollection makes him unhappy. (SKS 4, 9 / KW VI, 131)

Later Constantius brings out the existential meaning of repetition in a conceptual definition.

The dialectic of repetition is easy, for that which is repeated has been – otherwise it could not be repeated – but the very fact that it has been makes the repetition into something new. When the Greeks said that all knowing is recollecting, they said that all existence, which is, has been; when one says that life is a repetition, one says: actuality, which has been, now comes into existence. (SKS 4, 25 / KW VI, 149)

This is, perhaps, Constantius' most crucial formulation of the meaning of repetition, and we shall often return to it. Here it is enough to state that the distinction between recollection and repetition involves two opposed conceptions of the meaning of temporality, and to indicate that if the labour of recollection consists in tracing the new back to the old (the oldness of the new), the task of repetition is that the old becomes new (the newness of the old).

So, the first guiding question is that of historicity: How does the concept of repetition solve the conflict between a person's past and his relation to the future, between understanding and 'living'?

## 2. *The Question of the Other*

The second question follows from the first. In recollection, when the individual moves backwards through life, the future appears as a mere extension of the past. By thus being absorbed into the past, the future is robbed of genuine newness and otherness. In repetition, by contrast, a person realises an openness towards the future that is at the same time an openness towards the other.

The relation to the other is the main theme in the narrative of the Young Man's unhappy love story in *Repetition*. Living within the paradigm of recollection, the Young Man is unable to enter into a genuine relationship with another living human being. He could relate to the other only by making her something past, an object of recollection. Attempting to explain this conflict between love and recollection, Constantius several times alludes to one of the *Diapsalmata* from *Either/Or*. It reads

My misfortune [*Ulykke*] is this: an angel of death always walks at my side, and it is not the door of the chosen ones that I sprinkle with blood as a sign that he is to pass by – no, it is precisely their doors that he enters – for only recollection's love is happy [*lykkelig*]. (SKS 2, 49f / KW III, 41)

Stripped of its imagery, the dictum reads: 'My unhappiness is – that only recollection's love is happy.' Love becomes happy only when the beloved one has, figuratively, departed this life by becoming an object of recollection. But then it is no longer love of that other being, for he or she no longer exists outside the mind of the recollecting individual. In this sense, the angel of death, on the night of deliverance, enters the houses of the chosen ones; for within the paradigm of recollection death is inseparable from love. Constantius comments: 'Recollection's love, an author has said, is the only happy love. He is perfectly right in that, of course, provided one remembers that initially it

makes a person unhappy. Repetition's love is in truth the only happy love.'<sup>23</sup>

Repetition and recollection are here distinguished as two ways of relating to the other. This way of distinguishing follows from the basic determination of these categories. Recollection means assuming a fundamental unity of thought and being. The labour of thought is to trace all differences back to the primordial sameness of being. Within the paradigm of recollection a relation to an other person can therefore be established only by seeing this person as being rooted in the same truth or actuality as oneself, as inhabiting one's own world. The otherness of the other being is sublated in the sameness of one's own being. Thus, since the difference between self and other is dissolved in the unity of thought and being, the relation to the other as other is bound to be unhappy within this paradigm. In repetition, by contrast, the original unity is broken. The otherness of the other is somehow constituted in this break. If in recollection, the sameness of the self is the truth of the otherness of the other, in repetition, the otherness of the other is the truth of the sameness of the self (cf. Chapter Four).

### 3. *The Question of Becoming*

The third basic claim Constantius makes is that repetition provides a new answer to the question of becoming or motion (κίνησις) and thereby to the problem of the relation between being and nothing. His remarks concerning this issue are fragmentary, but indispensable in order to appreciate the meaning of repetition in relation to the history of metaphysics. He claims for instance that 'this category explains the relationship between the Eleatics and Heraclitus', and that 'in this connection the Greek view of the notion of *kinesis* corresponds to the modern category of "transition" and should be given close attention'.<sup>24</sup> At first sight these claims strike the reader as mysterious. What has repetition got to do with the pre-Socratic controversy concerning being and nothing and the nature of motion?

The question of becoming can be put in this way: Becoming presupposes both that there is something fixed and something that is in flux. If everything is fixed there is obviously no becoming; but equally, if all is flux there is no becoming for there is nothing against which change can be measured. If all is becoming, it is not even pos-

<sup>23</sup> SKS 4, 9 / KW VI, 131.

<sup>24</sup> SKS 4, 25 / KW VI, 148f.

sible to pass over a river once, as Kierkegaard notes with reference to a famous sentence by Heraclitus.<sup>25</sup> Becoming thus presupposes being. The question, then, is how being and becoming combine. By positing a realm of eternal being behind the realm of becoming, Platonic metaphysics can be seen as providing one answer to this question. Repetition gives a different answer. For repetition means the occurrence of identical cases in temporal succession; and thus, in repetition, identity does not reside in a realm apart from becoming, but is *a kind of becoming*. When Constantius therefore turns to the question of becoming, claiming that the category of repetition provides a new answer to this question, he is turning to one of the fundamental questions that underlie the entire metaphysical tradition. A new answer to this question would imply a new starting point for philosophy.

### *The Method and Structure of this Study*

I have already noted the essential methodological difficulties related to Kierkegaard's texts on repetition. These difficulties have to do with the fact that 'repetition' not only denotes a philosophical doctrine but a paradigm of thought, not a view of existence, but a mode of existing. Consequently, Kierkegaard could not communicate his category directly in a philosophical treatise, but only indirectly in the form of a psychological 'experiment' the success of which depends, ultimately, on the reader's response. In so far as 'repetition' is at all the kind of concept about which academic dissertations can be written, the aim of such work cannot therefore be to provide a systematic account of the meaning of this concept, but rather to give 'close readings' of the relevant texts. Most of the chapters of this study are therefore focused on one or two relatively short passages from Kierkegaard's writings. These 'close readings' are, of course, systematically connected to form a whole; but unlike a strictly systematic account, this 'whole' (expressed in summaries and conclusions) is not the goal towards which the individual readings strive, but the scaffolding that surrounds and supports these readings. This dissertation is, in other words, structured according to the principle of the primacy of the parts over against the whole. This methodology does not exclude a

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<sup>25</sup> *Pap. IV A 20 / JP 3290.*

synthesizing element, but it places the primary significance of this study on the individual readings rather than on the conclusions.

The six chapters of this book fall into three parts. Part One is mainly concerned with the question of historicity; Part Two deals with the question of the other, and Part Three with the question of becoming. In the final conclusion these three guiding questions are brought together and reconsidered on the basis of the distinction between repetition and recollection.

Chapter One, 'Constantius' Experimenting Psychology', explores a journal entry where a distinction is made between three attitudes to repetition which correspond to three stages in the development of the consciousness of the individual. In the experience of repetition (in the ordinary sense of the word) a person is not only confronted with a past moment of his life, he is also confronted with himself as the self of that past moment. He is thus forced to understand himself historically. The flight from repetition which Constantius sees as a characteristic of everyday existence is thus evidence of a failure to live historically. If Chapter One thus explores the inauthentic historicity of everyday life, Chapter Two deals with 'Models of Authentic Historicity in *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*'. Two basic ways of understanding the historical nature of existence are outlined in this chapter: authentic historicity understood as self-constancy through time or as openness towards the future. The three biblical figures discussed in the discourses (Job, Anna and Paul) are analysed as paradigmatic characters of the latter kind of being historical, and the conception of historicity implied by the discourses is contrasted to Heidegger's conception in *Sein und Zeit*.

The determination of authentic historicity as openness towards the future in Part One leads to the question of the other in Part Two. In Chapter Three, 'Time as the Trace of the Other', the relationship between time and the other is explored on the basis of the opening section of the third chapter of *The Concept of Anxiety*. As the interpretative key to this passage I use the image of Ingeborg's glance, arguing that Kierkegaard's conception of time and temporality in this passage is comparable to those of Heidegger and Lévinas. On the basis of a passage from *Philosophical Fragments*, my Chapter Four, entitled 'Reconciliation as the Fullness of Time', analyses the incarnation as a paradigm for post-metaphysical thinking. According to Climacus, the incarnation is constitutive of a genuine notion of difference and otherness that runs counter to the endeavours of Western metaphysics. For the 'fact' of the incarnation means that we do not

have access to God or Being through thought or recollection, but through the relationship with another historical being, Jesus Christ.

The two chapters of Part Three deal with the question of becoming. The aim is to clarify the relationship between the category of repetition and the tradition of Platonic metaphysics. Chapter Five, 'Becoming Precedes Being', asks the question in what sense the category of repetition can be said to provide a new answer to the Eleatic controversy concerning the nature of becoming, arguing that while recollection takes as point of departure the being of the thinking individual, repetition begins with his non-being (sin). Within the paradigm of repetition, the task is therefore not that of thinking the essence of being but that of coming into being. Chapter Six compares Kierkegaardian repetition with Nietzsche's conception of the eternal return of the same. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche both, in different ways, understood repetition as a paradigm of post-metaphysical thinking. In both cases the traditional metaphysical distinction between the temporal and the eternal is replaced by 'the historicizing of the eternal and the eternalizing of the historical'.<sup>26</sup> But while Nietzsche saw the event of nihilism as meaning the death of God and the impossibility of authentic religiousness, Kierkegaard saw the crisis of modernity as revealing the true meaning of the incarnation as the relationship to God as the absolute other.

The principle of the primacy of the parts over against the whole also seems to me to provide a way of coming to grips methodologically with the problem of pseudonymity. As long as the primary task is to read each text on its own premises, there is nothing to prevent us from seeing continuities between texts that belong to different and even opposed pseudonyms.

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<sup>26</sup> *Philosophical Fragments*, loc. cit.



## Part One

### The Question of Historicity

#### Chapter One

##### Constantius' 'Experimenting Psychology'

The subtitle of Constantius' *Repetition* – 'a Venture in Experimenting Psychology' – makes sense in at least two different ways. On one level, the designation 'experimenting' denotes the author's relationship to the imaginary figures of his narrative; on another level it describes his relationship to his reader.

On the first level, the experimenting nature of this book lies in its depiction of a series of individualities and situations in which the psychological meaning of repetition comes to light. The 'experiments' concerned are Constantius' travel to Berlin, his attempt to help the Young Man out of his unhappy love affair, and a number of anecdotal sketches scattered throughout the book. Obviously, this is not 'experimental psychology' in the ordinary sense of the word, for all the individuals involved in the experiments are fictional. It is rather an 'imaginary construction'<sup>27</sup> in which the author projects a number of existential possibilities in order to clarify psychologically the meaning of the concept of repetition. At this level Constantius' experimenting psychology resembles, I shall argue, a Hegelian phenomenology of spirit. The second level is expressed in Constantius' claim that he wrote in such a way that 'the heretics could not understand it'.<sup>28</sup> By presenting his category in the form of a riddle, the meaning of which cannot be deduced from the text but only surmised in an act of appropriation, Constantius enters into an experimenting relationship with his reader.

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<sup>27</sup> This is how Howard V. and Edna H. Hong render 'Experiment'. The concept is explored in their introduction to *Repetition* (KW VI, pp. XXI-XXIX).

<sup>28</sup> SKS 4, 91 / KW VI, 225.



If, on the first level, Constantius seems to communicate a psychologically and philosophically meaningful conception of the significance of repetition, on the second level, this communication is withdrawn because repetition turns out to be 'too transcendent',<sup>29</sup> and the direct communication of the meaning of repetition is substituted by an *indirect* communication of repetition as a moment of the appropriation of the reader. Climacus captures this tension between the two levels of Constantius' project when he defines the genre of the experiment as 'the conscious and teasing withdrawal of communication'.<sup>30</sup>

The aim of this chapter is to give an account of Constantius' experimenting psychology on the basis of this tension between the two levels of his experiment. I shall proceed in two steps. The main part of this chapter explores Constantius' phenomenological psychology of repetition on the basis of a distinction in the unpublished letter to J. L. Heiberg between three different attitudes to repetition. The concluding part argues that the acknowledged failure of this psychological experiment itself conceals another experiment the success or failure of which depends upon the reader's response.

### *A Phenomenological Psychology of Repetition*

Characteristically, Constantius' most comprehensive account of his category of repetition does not appear in his book with that title, but in a series of retrospective remarks in defence of that book. Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1791-1860), the leading arbiter of taste and a dominating intellectual figure in Kierkegaard's Copenhagen, had, in an essay from the end of 1843, criticised *Repetition* for being conceptually confused.<sup>31</sup> Constantius never finished the open letter he intended to

<sup>29</sup> SKS 4, 57 / KW VI, 186.

<sup>30</sup> SV3 9, 220 / KW XII, 263.

<sup>31</sup> The main point of Heiberg's criticism in his essay 'The Astronomic Year', (Published in *Urania, Yearbook for 1844*, quotations from Johan Ludvig Heibergs *Prosaiske Skrifter*, vol. 9, Copenhagen 1861) is worth consideration. By presenting his category as an answer both to the problem of motion and to the problem of freedom, Constantius had, according to Heiberg, confused the realm of nature with the realm of spirit (pp. 70-75). Heiberg's own understanding of the meaning of repetition forms an interesting contrast to that of Constantius. Observing and 'sympathizing with' the circular motions of the heavenly bodies, he suggests, would have a healing effect on the melancholy of the age. In themselves these repetitions are 'boring and dead', but they gain significance when they are 'mediated through the subject' (p. 74). This mediation of nature's repetition, 'one of the main keys to true wisdom', takes place when we open ourselves to nature so that its dead repetition

publish in response to Heiberg's critique; on the folder in which he kept the extensive material for this letter (about seventy pages in the Danish edition of his journals) he wrote: 'I ought not waste my time'.<sup>32</sup>

In one of the drafts of this letter Constantius draws a distinction that brings to light the phenomenological presuppositions of his project. He distinguishes three attitudes towards repetition corresponding to three successive conceptions of freedom in the development of the consciousness of the individual. (1) At the first stage freedom is understood in terms of desire [*Lyst*]. The individual fears repetition, 'for it seems as if [it] has a magic power to keep freedom captive once it has tricked it into its power'.<sup>33</sup> The figure of Don Juan is a representative of this attitude to repetition. This attitude, however, is only a transitory position, for sooner or later repetition will take place. Freedom in desire now despairs, and a new and higher form for freedom appears. (2) The second form of freedom is defined as prudence [*Klogskab*]. Having accepted the inescapability of repetition the individual now tries to escape boredom by using all his energy to gain variation in repetition. However, even when a sense of the infinity of variation has been developed, repetition will again appear as 'the trickery by which prudence wants to fool repetition and make it into something else'.<sup>34</sup> This position is represented by the essay in *Either/Or* I entitled 'The Rotation of Crops'. (3) At the final stage, freedom is no longer seen as opposed to repetition but identical with it. The problem in this position is therefore no longer how to escape repetition, but the seeming impossibility of realising it. This attitude to repetition is represented by the Young Man in *Repetition*.

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comes to life through our contemplation. '...when we know that the transitory comes back, we are comforted about its transitoriness; and when we know that the unchangeable, instead of being in deadly rest, moves through circles of changes, so we ought not to feel dull because of its monotony' (p. 80).

According to Constantius, Heiberg has misunderstood the significance of repetition in the realm of spirit. Repetition is not something that takes place outside the individual and which the individual can make an object of contemplation. For nature produces only similar, not identical cases. The meaning of repetition (if there is any) therefore belongs to the realm of spirit (cf. *Pap.* IV B 117, p. 296 / *KW* VI Suppl., pp. 315-316). Another point in Constantius' response is that Heiberg has misunderstood his concept of motion. The philosophical problem of motion, Constantius argues, belongs to the realm of spirit rather than nature. (The question of motion and repetition will be dealt with in Chapter Five.)

<sup>32</sup> *Pap.* IV B 109; not included in *JP*.

<sup>33</sup> *Pap.* IV B 117, p. 281 / *KW* VI Suppl., 301.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281 / p. 302.

Ultimately, even he fails to achieve the highest form of freedom; for instead of religious repetition, he ends up with poetic reproduction.<sup>35</sup>

The three attitudes thus make up the stages of a phenomenological gradation in which the meaning of repetition gradually becomes manifest in the individual. But what is the point of this gradation? What aspect of human existence is brought into light when we consider our relation to repetition? Constantius' delineation suggests that a person's attitude towards repetition reveals the extent to which he lives historically. In the moment of repetition the present self is confronted with the past self, and the individual must recognize himself. In terms of Constantius' own example it would not be enough for the Young Man to recognize his former fiancée as the true object of his love, he would also need to 'own' himself as the person who had proved unable to love her once she had returned his affection.

Since all three stages of a person's attitude towards repetition mark the failure to come to grips with one's past, the positive meaning of repetition remains hidden in Constantius' phenomenological psychology. In the context of the wider project of uncovering the meaning of Kierkegaardian repetition, this chapter therefore marks a *via negativa*. By pointing to the ways in which human beings in their everyday existence escape repetition, the existential meaning of repetition as a category of authentic historicity will come into view in a preliminary way. In Chapter Two this negative determination of the meaning of repetition will be superseded by a positive determination of its existential meaning on the basis of *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*. But we must first consider more closely the three attitudes to repetition in their interrelation.

### *First Stage: Repetition and Desire, Don Juan*

At the first stage in Constantius' phenomenological gradation, the individual tries to escape 'the magic power' of repetition in order to remain free in desire. Kierkegaard's early writings on the figure of Don Juan here supplement Constantius' remarks. The immense impact of this figure on Kierkegaard is evidenced by an early journal entry concerning Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni*. This figure, he writes, 'affected

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<sup>35</sup> For a careful study of the meaning of Kierkegaardian repetition with respect to the question of freedom see Dorothea Glöckners *Kierkegaards Begriff der Wiederholung* (Kierkegaard Studies. Monograph Series no. 3), Walter de Gruyter, Berlin and New York 1998, cf. my review in *Kierkegaardiana* 20, 1999, pp. 277-279.

me so diabolically' and 'drove me, like Elvira, out of the cloister's quiet night'.<sup>36</sup> Not surprisingly then, the most penetrating depiction of the first stage in Constantius' psychology of repetition appears in the essay on Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, 'The Immediate Erotic Stages or the Musical Erotic' in Volume One of *Either/Or*.<sup>37</sup>

'A', the pseudonymous author of the essay, contrasts the temporality of Don Juan's sensual love with that of psychic [*sjælelig*] love.<sup>38</sup> While psychic love binds together two concrete individuals in a relationship that endures through time, sensual love is momentary. The love of Hercules, he argues, was, despite his signal lack of faithfulness, fundamentally psychic because he loved each woman as an individual. The particularity of his love meant that it would have to endure through a span of time. Don Juan, by contrast, loves each girl momentarily. His love is not divided between different women, nor is it divided between different moments in the period of a love relationship; he puts his entire life into every moment. He tells no lie, therefore, when he tells each of them that she is the love of his life since for him there is no life beyond the moment. As a needle without thread he passes through his relationships.

The lack of historicity characteristic of Don Juan's sensual love, is expressed in the second servant aria where Leporella, his servant, reads the list of those seduced.<sup>39</sup> It reports that one-thousand-and-three wounded women await Don Juan at the Spanish border. This list is his past; it not only describes it. One-thousand-and-three is not a rounded number; it conveys a sense of something random and unfinished. And further, these are one-thousand-and-three different girls, disconnected apart from their encounter with Don Juan. The aria thus expresses a paradoxical relationship between repetition and historicity: precisely because no sense of the past connects the moments of Don Juan's life, it is reduced to a perpetual repetition of

<sup>36</sup> *Pap.* II A 491 / JP 2789. In a number of other early journal entries Kierkegaard depicts the figure of Don Juan as representing a counter-image to the Christian ethos. Only the sharp dualism between flesh and spirit, sin and grace, introduced by Christianity makes the figure of Don Juan possible as a representative of the sensual, he argues. This contrapuntal dependence on the Christian tradition means that Don Juan is not, and cannot be, a figure in his own right. His sensual powers do not belong to himself, but to the spiritual reality they negate (cf. *Pap.* I A 150 / JP 795; *Pap.* I A 181 / JP 737; *Pap.* II A 53 / JP 1968).

<sup>37</sup> *SKS* 2, 55-136 / *KW* III, 45-135.

<sup>38</sup> *SKS* 2, 98f. / *KW* III, 93f.

<sup>39</sup> *SKS* 2, 97 / *KW* III, 93.

moments. 'To see her and to love her is the same; this is in the moment. In the same moment everything is over, and the same thing repeats itself indefinitely.'<sup>40</sup>

The repetitions of Don Juan's sensual love are opposed to those of psychic love. Don Juan's lifestyle is adopted precisely in order to avoid the sense of continuity that follows from relationships that endure through time. He must move on in order not to be caught by his past. His conquest is a flight.

'A' captures the peculiar relationship between variation and repetition in Don Juan in his depiction of a certain tableau which once made a deep impression on him.<sup>41</sup> A handsome young man stands at the edge of a ditch. He is playing with a group of girls, all of them 'in that dangerous age when they are neither adults nor children'. The girls amuse themselves by jumping over the ditch, and the young man helps them by taking them around the waist, lifting them high into the air, and setting them down on the other side. In this way, Don Juan stands with one leg on each side of the ditch that separates individuality and natural force. When a girl is touched by him she passes from one side to the other. He himself, however, does not change his position; he just repeats over and over again the same movement. This momentary movement of seizing the girl, lifting her high in the air, and letting her down on the other side is the privilege of his position. He cannot take a girl back, since once she has been put down on the other side, she has become older than him. If a girl were allowed to return to him from the other side of life's ditch, he would be lost. Don Juan, therefore, skilfully avoids any close encounter with his former lovers. He needs new girls in order to maintain his transitory position.

In the crescendo of his essay, the analysis of the *Overture*, 'A' concludes that Don Juan's secret, which is also a secret to himself, is his substantial *angst*.<sup>42</sup> That Don Juan's *angst* is substantial means that it has become the hidden presupposition of his life. *Angst*, according to Kierkegaard, is the existential relationship to nothing;<sup>43</sup> only when this relationship is covered over does *angst* become substantial. In an earlier passage 'A' gives an image that conveys the meaning of substantial *angst*.

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<sup>40</sup> SKS 2, 99 / KW III, 95.

<sup>41</sup> SKS 2, 111f. / KW III, 108f.

<sup>42</sup> SKS 2, 128-131 / KW III, 126-130.

<sup>43</sup> SKS 4, 347-351 / KW VIII, 41-46.

When the sea heaves and is rough, the seething waves in their turbulence form pictures resembling creatures; it seems as if it were these creatures that set the waves in motion, and yet it is, conversely, the swelling waves that form them. Thus, Don Juan is a picture that is continually being formed but is never finished, about whose history one cannot learn except by listening to the noise of the waves. (SKS 2, 97 / KW III, 92)

In this way, Don Juan's conquering power does not belong to himself, but to the chaotic force it seems to negate.

Near the end of Mozart's opera Don Juan succumbs to the ghost of the commander, Elvira's father. This is a crucial point in A's analysis:

A spirit, an apparition, is a reproduction; this is the secret implicit in coming back.<sup>44</sup> But Don Juan is capable of everything, can withstand everything, except the reproduction of life, precisely because he is immediate, sensate life, of which spirit is the negation. (115 / 113)

Don Juan had been invulnerable in the realm of the moment, but a ghost, an intruder from the past, he cannot resist. The ghost thus slays him by forcing on him a sense of the past.

In the context of the question of repetition and historicity, A's interpretation of the figure of Don Juan can be summed up in three points. (1) Don Juan's flight from repetition, that is, his avoidance of any psychic and enduring relationships, signifies an *unconscious flight from historicity*. It is his own past he avoids when he avoids his former lovers; and this, not only in the sense that he escapes particular parts of his past, but what he evades is the very having-a-past, historicity. (2) By escaping the repetitions implied by a reciprocal relationship, Don Juan is caught in a kind of *compulsive repetition*. The perpetual commencement of new love-affairs becomes a means by which he continually detaches himself from his past. The compulsive repetition of the moments of his life is produced precisely by his unconscious flight from the repetition of these moments in consciousness (recollection) or in actuality (ethical repetition).<sup>45</sup> (3) Living in the

<sup>44</sup> 'at komme igjen' also means 'to haunt (a place)'.

<sup>45</sup> The concept of compulsive repetition is here employed in a semi-Freudian sense. In the essay 'Recollection, Repetition and Working Through' (1914, in *Collected Papers*, tr. by Joan Riviere, London 1971, pp. 366-376), Freud explains the significance of compulsive repetition for psychoanalysis. A patient who is unable to bring back the memory of forgotten and repressed experiences may, unknowingly, reproduce these experiences in action. This kind of repetition is the patient's 'way of remembering' (p. 370). The therapeutic task of the physician is to translate back repetition to recollection thus helping the patient effect a reconciliation with the repressed parts of himself.

One fundamental point of difference separates Freud's notion of repetition as reenactment from A's description of Don Juan. In Freud, repetition arises from the

twilight of an undeveloped consciousness, and in the borderland between natural force and individuality, Don Juan is an essentially *transitory figure*, signifying a transition to consciousness rather than a state of consciousness. It is always only a matter of time before he succumbs to repetition and thus becomes 'guilty' of his past.<sup>46</sup>

### *Second Stage: Repetition and Diversion*

The second of the three attitudes to repetition, that of prudence, arises in an individuality who has accepted repetition as a condition of life. The prudent person applies all his intellectual energy to trying to escape boredom by gaining variation in repetition. Freedom thus becomes a matter of distraction in repetition rather than an escape from it. Constantius mentions A's essay, 'The Rotation of Crops, a Venture in a Theory of Social Prudence' as an example of this position.<sup>47</sup>

'All people are boring.'<sup>48</sup> This is the basic principle of the world-view outlined in the 'Rotation of Crops'. But people can be boring in two ways: some (the plebeians) are boring to others, others (the aristocrats) are boring to themselves. Those who are not boring to them-

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failure to incorporate certain moments from the past in one's present consciousness. A's essay, on the other hand, indicates that Don Juan's repetitions arise from his flight from historicity. Don Juanian repetition is an unsuccessful escape from *historicity as such*, whilst Freudian repetition marks failure in relation to *one particular point in the history of the individual*. The question is whether the repression of particular memories is grounded merely in the character of these memories or in a more primordial flight from historicity.

The connection between Kierkegaardian and Freudian repetition is dealt with by J. Preston Cole in *The Problematic Self in Kierkegaard and Freud*, Yale UP, New Haven and London 1971, Ch. 8; and by George Stack in 'Repetition in Kierkegaard and Freud', *The Personalist* LVIII (1977), pp. 249-260; cf. Kresten Nordentoft's study *Søren Kierkegaard's Psychology*, tr. by Bruce Kirmmse, Duquesne UP 1972.

<sup>46</sup> In this respect, Milan Kundera's interpretation of the Don Juan figure in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1983) is completely in tune with A's concept. By focusing on the moments in which the lightness of a non-committal erotic life becomes unbearable, he has thematized the necessary metamorphosis of a Don Juan. The outcome of this metamorphosis, however, seems to be a tragic hero rather than an ethical individual. Consistent with this turn, the explicit philosophical framework for the novel is Nietzsche's eternal recurrence rather than Kierkegaard's repetition.

M. Jamie Ferreira has explored the relationship between *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* and *Repetition* in her essay 'Repetition, Concreteness and Imagination' in *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 25 (1989), pp. 13-34.

<sup>47</sup> SKS 2, 271-289 / KW III, 281-300.

<sup>48</sup> SKS 2, 275 / KW III, 285.

selves are generally boring to others, and those who bore themselves are entertaining, not only to the plebeians, but especially to their fellow aristocrats. Plebeians think that idleness is the root of all evil; but this would be true only if work were the destiny of human life. The true aristocrats, however, know that the destiny of human life is amusement rather than work. Consequently, the ultimate evil is boredom rather than idleness. Boredom itself 'is the demonic pantheism',<sup>49</sup> for as in pantheism all there is, is God, so in boredom: all there is, is naught. Boredom is 'pantheistic' because it leaves nothing behind but encounters everywhere 'the nothing that interlaces existence [*Tilværelsen*]'.<sup>50</sup>

Having thus outlined his three basic assumptions – that all people are boring, that boredom is the root of all evil, and that the essence of boredom is a sense of the nothingness of all there is – 'A' now turns to the question of how we can get out of it. The answer lies in his metaphoric interpretation of the agricultural concept of 'the rotation of crops' [*Vexeldrift*]. This principle can be understood in two ways, he argues. The vulgar, inartistic, understanding thinks that the point is the continual changing of soil. Thus, the reliance on the power of variation makes people move to the city when they are tired of the country, and to America when they are *Europamüde*. This vulgar method depends on 'the boundless infinity of change, its extensive dimension'.<sup>51</sup> The true rotation of crops, however, does not consist in changing the soil, but in changing the method of cultivation and the kinds of crops. It seeks relief in intensity rather than extensity. What matters is not the amount of variation, but the ingenuity which can make even a tiny little variation cause a complete change of aspect.<sup>52</sup>

Two examples illustrate how this principle works. (1) A prisoner in solitary confinement can, if he is sufficiently ingenious, get more amusement and diversion from seeing a spider running over the floor than he would get from moving to a new cell. The spider brings relief to the prisoner precisely because it does not concern his situation essentially. As something accidental, the spider carries with it the possibility of the appearance of a new situation in which the accidental has become essential and the essential accidental. The prisoner's ingenuity

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<sup>49</sup> SKS 2, 279 / KW III, 290.

<sup>50</sup> SKS 2, 280 / KW III, 291.

<sup>51</sup> SKS 2, 281 / KW III, 291.

<sup>52</sup> SKS 2, 281 / KW III, 292.



consists in his ability to provoke this sudden reversal of what is essential and accidental in the moment, and the spider is the 'occasion' without which no such change could take place. A new cell, on the other hand, would always contain a reminder of his being imprisoned. (2) 'A' tells about an acquaintance who, whenever they met, would start talking at length about philosophy. These were painful and boring conversations for 'A', until one day he noticed that the other person perspired unusually much when he was talking. From that moment everything was changed; he started watching how the pearls of perspiration collected on his forehead and his eyes, and he followed them with great amusement on their way down to the nose.<sup>53</sup> Like the prisoner, 'A' here escapes boredom by shifting the focus of the situation. By grasping something completely accidental (a spider, a pearl of sweat, etc.) and changing it to the essential point of the situation, a person can thus rid himself from the sense of boredom.

The ingenuity which enables a person to make this shift consists, we are told, in the ability to *forget*. 'A' distinguishes the ability to forget from mere forgetfulness. In a forgetful person experiences simply disappear from consciousness, while true forgetting 'reduces experience to a sounding board'.<sup>54</sup> The art of forgetting is a peculiar way of remembering, rather than a way of getting rid of certain memories. When we forget in this sense, we *do* something to our memories; past experiences are remembered in such a way that the very act of remembering itself is an act of forgetting. The prisoner in solitary confinement illustrates the meaning of forgetting. His abandonment to the spider episode was conditioned by his ability to detach this situation from his own history. The spider brings him relief because it occasions him for a moment to rid himself of the point of view imposed on him by the past; it enables him to experience the world as on the day of creation, as it were.

Forgetting and remembering in this sense are only possible when a person has freed himself from hope, 'A' continues. As long as the individual lives with 'the speed of hope' certain experiences will make an indelible impression because they seem to contain a promise of fulfilment. For a truly artistic person, however, any moment in life is insignificant enough to be forgotten. Even in the greatest enjoyment there is, for the artist, an element of reserve which renders a retreat possible. The goal is the moment 'when in the midst of enjoyment

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<sup>53</sup> SKS 2, 288 / KW III, 299.

<sup>54</sup> SKS 2, 283 / KW III, 294.

one looks at it in order to recollect it'.<sup>55</sup> The art of forgetting will thus provide the 'Archimedean point with which one lifts the whole world'.<sup>56</sup> Once a person has been perfected in the art of forgetting and remembering, he is able to 'play shuttlecock with all existence [*Tilværelsen*]'.<sup>57</sup>

'The Rotation of Crops' is perhaps Kierkegaard's most successful attempt to articulate a self-contained aesthetic world-view. It does not, however, remain unchallenged by Judge William, the pseudonymous author of *Either/Or* 2. In the long letter entitled 'The Aesthetic Validity of Marriage', he imagines that 'A', if he got married, would have to arrange his life with his wife according to 'the secrecy system'. Every encounter should be wrapped in mystery and ambiguity 'in order to post-pone that deadly moment when you would look at each other, and behold – you were bored'.<sup>58</sup> The main point of the letter, he writes, is to convince 'A' that he needs 'a completely different idea of time and of the meaning of repetition'.<sup>59</sup> 'Your mistake is that you do not think historically.'<sup>60</sup> This objection leads to the final stage in the development of the concept of repetition in relation to freedom.

### *Third Stage: Repetition and Poetic Reproduction*

If Don Juan's flight is unconscious, resulting from a substantial *angst*, the 'art of forgetting' advocated by 'A' in 'The Rotation of Crops' is a deliberate flight from historicity. The inability on the part of both these characters to face their past in the moment of repetition marks the failure of their respective concepts of individual freedom. The third attitude, 'freedom in repetition', stands out from the two previous ones since repetition is here seen as a means of freedom (or, as freedom itself) rather than as something to be overcome in freedom. This attitude is represented by the Young Man from *Repetition*. In this character the problem of historicity becomes so pressing that the failure of the two preceding notions of freedom becomes evident. Constantius writes:

<sup>55</sup> SKS 2, 283 / KW III, 293f.

<sup>56</sup> SKS 2, 284 / KW III, 295.

<sup>57</sup> SKS 2, 283 / KW III, 294.

<sup>58</sup> SKS 3, 109 / KW IV, 108.

<sup>59</sup> SKS 3, 140 / KW IV, 141.

<sup>60</sup> SKS 3, 127 / KW IV, 128.

In the individual... repetition appears as a task of freedom, in which the question becomes that of saving one's personality from being volatilized and, so to speak, in pawn to events. The moment it is apparent that the individual can lose himself in event, fate, lose himself in such a way that he therefore by no means stops contemplating but loses himself in such a way that freedom is taken up completely in life's fraction without leaving a remainder, then the issue becomes manifest.... (*Pap. IV B 117*, p. 296 / *KW VI Suppl.*, 315)

What does it mean that one's personality can be 'in pawn to events'? In pawning an object the owner hands over his property to another person without giving it up. Similarly, a person can hand over his personality to 'fate and events'. This happens when 'freedom is taken up completely in life's fraction without leaving a remainder'. Unless there is a repetition in the realm of spirit, Constantius seems to be saying, there is no way in which the individual can maintain himself over against the power of history. The life of the individual would then be absorbed in history in such a way that the future would become a mere extension of the past, and the individual would then have the same relation to the events of his life as a child has to the movements of the toy horse he rides in a roundabout. In Erich Frank's words: 'It is a well known fact that in history the results of our willed actions reach beyond the mark of their intended goal, thus revealing an inner logic of things which overrules the will of man.'<sup>61</sup>

This conflict between the intended goals of our actions and their actual results is one of the central themes in Constantius' *Repetition*. Seen as a whole, this book is the story of the consequences of a Young Man's love affair. These consequences are depicted in the two interrelated narratives of the Young Man's escape from Copenhagen and of Constantius' journey to Berlin.<sup>62</sup> We shall here concentrate on the story of the Young Man.

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<sup>61</sup> Quoted by Rudolf Bultmann in *History and Eschatology*, Edinburgh 1957, p. 3.

<sup>62</sup> Apparently, there are two levels of narration in *Repetition*. There is, on the one hand, the story about the Young Man's unhappy love affair, and, on the other, the story of Constantius' project of finding out the meaning of repetition, his Berlin journey etc. In the end, however, the distinction between these two characters dissolves when Constantius admits that the Young Man is his own creation (*SKS* 4, 93 / *KW VI*, 228). At the same time, however, he also indicates that the young man is the only authentic person, and that all that is said by himself is but the Young Man's ventriloquism (94 / 228). One way of interpreting this quasi-relationship between the narrator and the Young Man would be to say that what is depicted in this story is a person's memory of a past time of his life. The ensuing conflict between the two characters is a conflict in the conscience of a person who has betrayed the earnestness of his youth and now realises that no repetition is possible. The curious relationship between the two protagonists in *Repetition* would, I sug-

The Young Man's first visit to Constantius' home deserves close attention.<sup>63</sup> The Young Man who makes his entry in this passage had earlier made an impression on Constantius as a youth in 'that captivating age in which the spiritual maturity announces itself...' But that day his appearance is as if transfigured. With 'large glowing eyes' he tells that he has confessed his love for a certain girl and found love in return. Constantius has no doubts; the young man is 'deeply and fervently and beautifully and humbly in love'. The young man had gone to see Constantius because he was unable to leave the girl on her own. He needs distraction, and so he suggests that they should go for a carriage ride. Constantius is with him; he sends for a carriage and asks his friend to have a seat and fill a pipe while he finishes a couple of business letters. The Young Man, however, is too restless to sit down. He paces back and forth repeating again and again with tearful eyes a verse by Poul Møller:

Then, to my easy chair,  
Comes a dream from my youth.  
To my easy chair.  
A heartfelt longing comes over me for you,  
Thou sun of women.

The verse is taken from the poem 'The Old Lover'<sup>64</sup> in which Poul Møller portrays an older man looking back on his long-lost love. In a diary entry from the period his own engagement, Kierkegaard depicts how a young man while reading this poem makes a double projection. 'He first dreams that he is old in order to suck in through the funnel of a whole life the most aromatic moment of his earliest youth.' This procedure of projecting oneself into a distant future and then back again to the present moment is 'the second power of the dream'.<sup>65</sup> In this way the Young Man not only dreams about his future or his past; he changes the present into a dream. 'Poetizing' is Kierkegaard's term for this projection by which the young man removes himself from the present and, as it were, starts living behind actuality.

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gest, become less bewildering once the Young Man is considered a product of Constantius' memory rather than of his imagination.

<sup>63</sup> *SKS* 4, 11-14 / *KW* VI, 133-136.

<sup>64</sup> *Poesi og Prosa af Poul M. Møller*, udvalgt og indledet af P. Hansen, Copenhagen 1891, pp. 9-13.

<sup>65</sup> *Pap.* III A 95 / *JP* 804.

Constantius senses all this as he secretly observes his friend from the desk. The fatal mistake, he reasons, is that the young man is at the conclusion of the relationship at the moment when it is about to start. His relationship to the beloved would remain essentially unchanged if she died, since her actuality is already translated by recollection into his past. The fatal mistake of poetizing is inherent in genuine erotic love.<sup>66</sup> The question is if there is a way out of this mistake, if the beloved can be brought back to life once she has been projected into the past. Constantius writes:

It must be true that a person's life is over and done with in the first moment, but there must also be a vital force to slay this death and transform it to life. In the first dawning of erotic love, the present and the future contend with each other to find an eternal expression, and this recollection is indeed eternity's flowing back into the present – that is, when this recollecting is sound. (SKS 4, 15 / KW VI, 137)

The rest of the story of the Young Man depicts his search for the force that transforms death into life. We are not here concerned with the individual steps of this search – his escape from Copenhagen, his reading of the Book of Job, etc. – but only with its end point. For at the end of his journey the Young Man becomes a poet, and poetry becomes for him the life-transforming power.

One day he reads in the newspaper that his former beloved has married another man. He feels greatly relieved; now he has been freed from the burden of his past. The sense of obligation to return to her has vanished, and the future once again seems open. The girl has been the occasion for the awakening of his poetic sense, and now when she has disappeared, he can return to the world of poetizing. The Young Man is convinced that he has been set free by repetition.<sup>67</sup> But Constantius disagrees: the Young Man returns to the ideal world of poetry and therefore belongs to the realm of recollection; genuine repetition, on the other hand, is a return to actuality. The Young Man was absolved from his past through the course of events (the girl's marriage); genuine repetition is a religious transfiguration in which a person is absolved from the past through an encounter with God. The fact that he becomes a poet, according to Constantius, marks his failure to break through the 'second power of the dream' and return to actuality. Instead of a religious transfiguration, the young man obtains a poetic productivity that is carried by a religious

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<sup>66</sup> SKS 4, 13-15 / KW VI, 136f.

<sup>67</sup> SKS 4, 87 / KW VI, 221.

mood. In its essence such poetic existence is failed religiousness.<sup>68</sup> The young man's 'repetition' is thus relegated to the final stage in the negative phenomenology of freedom.

The final note in *Repetition* is struck by the conflict between poetic projection and religious transfiguration. This conflict can be traced back to the earliest part of Kierkegaard's writing. A journal entry from 1840 concludes: 'The poetic life in the personality is the unconscious sacrifice, the *molimina* [exertion] of the Divine, because it is first in the religious that the sacrifice becomes conscious and the misrelation is removed.'<sup>69</sup> In his doctoral dissertation, *The Concept of Irony* (1841), he distinguished between 'poetizing oneself' and 'being poetized' as two incompatible ways of being reconciled with actuality.<sup>70</sup> Poetry reconciles by giving another, higher and more perfect 'actuality' instead of the given one; religion reconciles by transubstantiating actuality.<sup>71</sup> This theme is developed in *Either/Or* (1843). Both A's and Judge William's conceptions of the meaning of poetry are captured in the dictum that 'a poetic existence is generally a human sacrifice.'<sup>72</sup> In the opening passage of *Diapsalmata* 'A' refers to the story of the tyrant Phalaris who had a brazen oxen fashioned in which he could roast his enemies alive. It was constructed in such a way that the cries of the victims were modulated into music. 'What is a poet', A asks, and he answers: 'An unhappy man who conceals deep pains in his heart, but whose lips are so fashioned that when the sigh or the cry pass out of them they sound like beautiful music.'<sup>73</sup> The most powerful expression of this conflict is the description of 'a poet-existence inclined towards the religious' in *The Sickness unto Death* (1849). From the point of view of Christianity, Anti-Climacus argues, this mode of existence is caught in 'the sin of any poetic existence: the sin of poetizing instead of being'. He continues:

As a person who becomes unhappy in love turns into a poet and then blissfully extols the joys of love, that is how he became the poet of the religiousness. He has become unhappy in religiousness; he realizes vaguely that what is required of him is to let go of this torment, that is, to humble himself under it in faith.... But to take it upon him-

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<sup>68</sup> SKS 4, 94f. / KW VI, 228-230.

<sup>69</sup> Pap. III A 62 / JP 1027.

<sup>70</sup> SKS 1, 316 / KW II, 280.

<sup>71</sup> SKS 1, 330f. / KW II, 297.

<sup>72</sup> SKS 3, 202 / KW IV, 210.

<sup>73</sup> SKS 2, 27 / KW III, 19.

self in faith, that he cannot do, that is to say, really it is something he is unwilling to do, or his self comes to an end in obscurity at this point.<sup>74</sup>

According to these quotations there are two aspects to the tragedy of a poetic existence. On one level the poet becomes a human sacrifice when poetizing replaces being. Instead of existing in the actual world, the poet creates a world he can inhabit. But the essential tragedy of a poetic existence lies on a deeper level, in the fact that this sacrifice is 'unconscious' or only 'vaguely realized' by the poet himself. When the poet gives himself up for the sake of artistic productivity, the meaning of this sacrifice remains hidden to himself. For Kierkegaard, Goethe is the prime example of this misrelation in a poet-existence. 'Therefore Goethe is less appealing', he writes in the margin of the journal entry quoted above, 'because he is too self-confident to be a sacrifice and not profound enough to want to be one.'<sup>75</sup> George Pattison has pointed out the analogy to the way in which in psycho-analysis the patient's dreams are taken to reveal a content which is not simply different from, but which positively contradicts the patient's conscious intentions. Similarly, the artist 'does not comprehend the source and significance of the suffering by which his creative work is in fact fuelled'.<sup>76</sup> Art is therefore not merely a sublimation of suffering in beautiful images, but it has to do with a person's unwillingness to expose his need for healing.

Both aspects of Kierkegaard's conception of the poet-existence are represented in Constantius' Young Man: He not only gives up actuality in favour of imagination, but he considers this sacrifice a gain. The truth of his poetic existence, his failure to live an actual life, remains hidden to himself.

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<sup>74</sup> SV3 15, 131f. / KW XIX, 77f. Quoted from *The Sickness unto Death*, tr. by Alastair Hannay, Penguin Classics 1989, pp. 109f.

<sup>75</sup> Pap. III A 62 / JP 1027. In another entry he describes Goethe as a brilliant swimmer who never ventured out on deep water (Pap. VIII,1 A 127 / JP 1046).

<sup>76</sup> George Pattison *Kierkegaard and the Crisis of Faith*, SPCK, London 1997, pp. 77-78. This theme has also been explored by George Pattison in *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious*, (Macmillan, London 1992, pp. 57-62), 'The Conscious and the Unconscious Sacrifice. Kierkegaard on Art Suffering and Religion' (in S. W. Sykes (ed.) *Sacrifice and Redemption. Durham Essays in Theology*, Cambridge University Press 1991, pp. 205-217), and 'Kierkegaard and the Sublime' (*Kierkegaard Studies. Yearbook 1998*, Berlin / New York 1998, pp. 245-275).

*Proust and Constantius*

The concluding pages of Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* mark the point at which a poetic account of historicity collides head-on with Constantius' religious account, and where the opposition between poetizing and being poetized becomes clear. In the preceding volumes of this monumental novel the narrator has given a painstaking account of the time he wasted with silly, pointless and sometimes horrible things in his effort one day to become an author. The narrative ends at the point when he is finally able to sit down and start writing a book which will bring all these disjointed moments of his life into a unified whole. He reached this point at a high-society afternoon party, as he suddenly started noticing the painted faces in a new way. A sense of 'wasted time' overcame him, and he was filled at once with a feeling of impotence in relation to his own past, and with a desire to write a novel that would redeem and justify his past life. The creation of this perfect work of art would change the disconnected moments of his life into a meaningful whole.

However, this artistic reconciliation with the past demands, the narrator argues, a new relation to the past. Recollection must itself undergo a change before it can reproduce life artistically. The problem with recollection is that 'when it introduces the past, unmodified, into the present – the past just as it was at the moment when it was itself the present – suppresses the mighty dimension of Time which is the dimension in which life is lived'.<sup>77</sup> It is only, therefore, when the poetic reproduction of life replaces recollection that reconciliation with the past is achieved.<sup>78</sup>

The Young Man in Constantius' narrative ends precisely where the narrator in *Time Regained* ends. For him also recollection could not instil any genuine reconciliation with the past. He therefore sought

<sup>77</sup> Marcel Proust *Remembrance of Past Things*, vol. 3: *The Captive, The Fugitive, Time Regained*, tr. by C. K. Scott, T. Kilmartin, and A. Mayor, Chatto & Windus, London 1981, p. 1087.

<sup>78</sup> Alexander Nehamas sees in Proust's novel 'the best possible model' for Nietzsche's eternal recurrence. By reproducing his own life in the novel the narrator fulfils Zarathustra's call: 'become who you are' (*Nietzsche, Life as Literature*, London 1994, pp. 167-169). In a similar line of thought, Joakim Garff has argued that Constantius' repetition is a textual rather than existential category. According to his interpretation, Constantius never went to Berlin, but remained at home and 'repeated a recollection in writing. And thus, writing gave him that repetition which life had denied him' (Joachim Garff "*Den Søvnløse*", Copenhagen 1995, p. 154).



another kind of reconciliation, repetition as experienced by Job when after a period of dreadful suffering, God spoke to him. But instead of being transfigured religiously like Job, the Young Man began to reproduce himself poetically. In becoming a poet, however, he was not reconciled with his actual past, but a poetic ideality substituted for his actuality. The tragedy of Constantius' Young Man does not so much lie in the sublimation of erotic love to poetry, as in the substitution of being with poetizing, of being poetized with poetizing oneself. And the fact that this made the Young Man happy did not convince Constantius of the authenticity of this substitution; it rather showed that he remained 'an unconscious sacrifice'.

### *Constantius' Method*

In a certain sense, Constantius' psychology of repetition ends where it began. For despite the Young Man's fervent attempt to come to grips with his past, he has come no further than Don Juan with respect to Constantius' project of actualising repetition. Admittedly, he no longer avoids repetition, but the quasi-repetition of poetic productivity marks only a more developed stage of that flight from historicity of which the figure of Don Juan is a primitive example. Neither of them has undergone that transfiguration in which the old becomes new; Don Juan because he did not admit the old into the new, the Young Man because the old was sublated into the new. *Repetition* thus concludes with Constantius resigning from his project: 'Repetition is too transcendent for me'.<sup>79</sup>

What is the meaning of this resignation? Has Constantius achieved anything with his 'experimenting psychology'? Does Constantius' project simply collapse from within? Does his apparent phenomenology of repetition reduce to deconstruction? Or has, in some sense, the meaning of repetition come into view precisely when its impossibility has become manifest?

A comparison of Constantius' experimenting psychology with Hegel's phenomenology can serve to clarify these questions. As in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Constantius depicts three stages in the development of consciousness. The insight that is lacking in one state of consciousness becomes the consciousness of the following

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<sup>79</sup> SKS 4, 57 / KW VI, 186.

state. The first position escapes repetition; when this turns out to be impossible, the second position seeks diversion in repetition; when this turns out to be impossible the third position seeks poetic reproduction. Each position in this progression thus makes up for the failure of the previous one. But if for Hegel this progression ends in the coming to itself of consciousness, for Constantius the end point is itself a point of disintegration. Two images can illustrate this difference. According to Hegel, the forms of consciousness unfold progressively just as in a plant the bud disappears in the blossom, and the blossom is 'refuted' by the fruit.<sup>80</sup> Constantius' understanding of the development of consciousness, on the other hand, can be illustrated with the image of a pearl oyster. A grain of sand has disturbed its inner life. Being unable to eject it, the oyster starts covering it up with nacre, until a beautiful pearl appears. This pearl results from an inability to overcome the original disturbance. In a similar way the beautiful images created by the highest forms of consciousness result from a repressed need for healing. Constantius' gradation of the forms of consciousness thus constitutes a negative phenomenology that not only *observes* (*zuseht*) the coming to itself of consciousness in the individual, but like a doctor, makes a diagnosis, and *exposes the concealed need for healing* in each form of consciousness.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>80</sup> E.g. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, tr. by A. V. Miller, Oxford 1977, p. 2.

<sup>81</sup> The conception of Kierkegaard's negative phenomenology comes from Arne Grøn. (cf. *Subjektivitet og negativitet: Kierkegaard*, Copenhagen 1997 and 'Kierkegaards Phänomenologie?', *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* 1996, Berlin / New York 1996, pp. 91-116.) On the basis of *The Sickness unto Death*, he has argued that Anti-Climacus' / Kierkegaard's method is phenomenological, not merely in the sense that descriptions of phenomena play a crucial role, but also in the more Hegelian sense that these descriptions are tied together as stages in the coming-to-itself of consciousness. Anti-Climacus' depiction of the forms of despair, he argues, is guided by a methodological tension (p. 33). On the one hand we have the words and attitudes with which a person expresses his own self-understanding, and on the other hand we have the conclusions which the spectator or analyst draws from this. The phenomenological progression results from this tension between what the person says and what we see; between the explicit and the implicit meaning of what is being said. Thus, the person is judged by his own words – by means of the spectator.

For both Hegel and Kierkegaard, the phenomenological gradation describes a process in which the self's consciousness of itself comes into being through its consciousness of being alienated or in despair. In Kierkegaard, however, the progression of the self's coming to itself is followed by an intensification of despair. This is due to the fact that for Kierkegaard, unlike Hegel, the forms of despair reflect the will as well as consciousness. In Kierkegaard's phenomenology, 'consciousness and will are woven together in such a way that consciousness itself is a matter of will' (p. 141). The methodological shift from the noetical to the volitional shows how the

We can therefore distinguish two levels of Constantius' experimenting psychology. On one level he is a Hegelian observer who seeks to discover the meaning of repetition in the various forms of consciousness. Constantius describes this experimenting method as follows: 'I wanted to depict and make visible psychologically and aesthetically; in a Greek sense I wanted to let the concept come into being in individuality and situation, working itself forward through all sorts of misunderstandings.'<sup>82</sup> Unlike Hegel's phenomenology, however, the concept never comes forth in the individualities depicted in Constantius' *Repetition*. On this level Constantius' project is therefore a failure. On a deeper level, however, this failure constitutes a *via negativa* to the meaning of repetition; the failure of his project becomes a riddle rather than an answer. But the realisation of this second level of Constantius' project depends on his reader. This deeper meaning of Constantius' experimenting psychology is hinted at in his methodological claim that he wrote 'in such a way that the heretics would not understand him.' Johannes Climacus brings out this deeper meaning in his remark on *Repetition* in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846): 'By taking place in the form of an experiment, the communication creates for itself an opposition, and the experiment establishes a chasmic gap between reader and author...the experiment is the conscious, teasing withdrawal of communication.'<sup>83</sup>

To sum up: the subtitle to Constantius' book – *a Venture in Experimenting Psychology* – makes sense on two levels. On one level the designation 'experimenting' characterizes the author's relationship to his imaginary figures, and on the other level, it describes his relationship to his reader. If, on the first level, Constantius is an observer who depicts the progression of consciousness through its various forms, on the second level he is a doctor who uncovers the need for healing. That repetition is the only way out of the conflict intrinsic to the historicity of existence is a riddle Constantius is left with rather than a solution he suggests.

If the existential meaning of repetition is only determined in an indirect and preliminary way through the figures of Constantius' psychology, this want is to some extent made up for by the portrayal of a number of figures of faith in the edifying discourses from the same period. To these models of authentic historicity we must now turn.

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Christian doctrine of sin has radicalized Kierkegaard's phenomenological approach.

<sup>82</sup> *Pap.* IV B 117, p. 282 / *KW* VI, 302.

<sup>83</sup> *SV* 3 9, 220 / *KW* XII, 263.

## Chapter Two

### Models of Authentic Historicality in *Eighteen Edifying Discourses*

If the preceding chapter argued that flight from historicity is the existential meaning of various evading attitudes to repetition, the present chapter moves on to investigate positively the existential meaning of repetition. In attempting to bring to light authentic historicity we turn from Constantius' failed project in *Repetition* to *Eighteen Edifying Discourses*, published in Kierkegaard's own name between 1843 and 1844.<sup>84</sup> Not only do these discourses belong to the same pe-

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<sup>84</sup> In *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* (1848) Kierkegaard wrote: 'I passed out *Either/Or* to the world with my left hand, and with my right hand *Two Edifying Discourses*; but all, or as good as all, grasped my left hand with their right' (SV3 18, 91 / KW XXII, 36). Generally speaking, the main positions within the Kierkegaard reception have until recently only been able to pay lip service to the primacy thus ascribed to the religious discourses over against the pseudonymous writings by Kierkegaard himself.

One exception is Martin Heidegger, who in *Being and Time* expresses a sense of the unique importance of the discourses for Kierkegaard's work. In one of his notes on Kierkegaard he writes that because Kierkegaard was still under the spell of Hegel 'there is more to be learned *philosophically* from his edifying writings than from his theoretical ones – with the exception of *The Concept of Anxiety*' (SZ, 235, note vi / BT, 494, note vi, my italics). The 'edifying writings' Heidegger here refers to are probably not the *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* from 1843-44, since they were not (as far as I know) translated to German at that time (1927). The only collection of discourses contained in Eugen Diederichs edition of *Søren Kierkegaard's Gesammelte Werke* in 12 volumes, to which Heidegger referred in an earlier note (SZ 190n / BT 492), is *Practice in Christianity*. It is therefore likely that the 'edifying writings' to which Heidegger refers are the *Ausgewählte Christliche Reden* (tr. by Julie von Reincke, Giessen 1901). In these *Christian Discourses* from 1848 Kierkegaard makes the analysis of concern or care [*Bekymring*] without which Heidegger's conception of Dasein as *Sorge* would perhaps have been inconceivable. (Both Arne Grøn and George Pattison have in conversations pointed to Heidegger's unacknowledged indebtedness to these discourses for his Dasein analysis.)

Whereas Heidegger showed interest in the discourses because they seemed to him philosophically more valuable than Kierkegaard's theoretical works, a number

riod as Constantius' book (three of them being published on the same day as *Repetition*), there is also a thematic connection between these works. The failure of the figures of Constantius' experimenting psychology to uncover the meaning of repetition gives way, in the *Discourses*, to a series of Biblical figures that embody the meaning of repetition and authentic historicity. Three of these figures, Job, Anna and Paul, will be analysed in the main part of this chapter. In the concluding section, the relationship between the form of the discourses and the concept of repetition will be considered.

Before I turn to these figures, however, we must briefly reconsider the concept of historicity in order to clarify in a preliminary way the connection between repetition and historicity. What is the problem of historicity? In what sense does the notion of repetition provide an answer to this problem?

The history of the concept of historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*) can be described in two stages. The first philosophical coinage of this con-

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of more recent studies have explored the discourses as religious literature. These studies include: Bruun, Søren K. 'Det opbyggelige i Søren Kierkegaards forfatter-skab' in *Præsteforeningens Blad* no. 86 (1996), pp. 669-677; Deuser, Hermann 'Religious Dialectics and Christology' in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, Cambridge 1998, pp. 376-396; Gouwens, David J. *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker*, Cambridge 1996; Harbsmeier, Eberhard 'Das Erbauliche als Kunst des Gesprächs. Reflexionen über die homilethische Perspektiven in Kierkegaards erbaulichen Reden' in *Kierkegaard Studies. Yearbook 1996*, Berlin / New York 1996, pp. 293-313; Kingo, Anders *Analogiens teologi. En dogmatisk studie over dialektikken i Søren Kierkegaards opbyggelige og pseudonyme forfatterskab*, Copenhagen 1995 (*Habilitationsschrift*, critically reviewed by Hermann Deuser ('Guds almagt og menneskets frihed', *Fønix* 1995, pp. 39-54) and Arne Grøn ('Kierkegaards forudsætning', *Dansk teologisk Tidsskrift* no. 58 (1995), pp. 267-290)); Kingo, Anders *Den opbyggelige tale. En systematisk-teologisk studie over Søren Kierkegaards opbyggelige forfatterskab*, Gads Forlag, Copenhagen 1987; Larsen, K. Olesen 'Den opbyggelige tale...' in *Søren Kierkegaard læst af K. Olesen Larsen 1-2*, Copenhagen 1966, vol 2, pp. 94-103; Müller, Paul 'Der Begriff "Das Erbauliche" bei Søren Kierkegaard' in *Kerygma und Dogma* no. 31 (1985), pp. 116-134 (cf. *Fønix* VII (1983), pp. 1-16); Pattison, George 'A Dialogical Approach to Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses' in *Zeitschrift für neuere Theologiegeschichte*, 3. Bd. (1996), pp. 185-202; Pattison, George 'If Kierkegaard is right about Reading, Why Read Kierkegaard?' in *Kierkegaard Revisited, Kierkegaard Studies, Monograph Series 1*, Berlin / New York 1997, pp. 291-309; Pattison, George 'The Theory and Practice of Language and Communication in Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses' in *Kierkegaardiana* 19 (1998), pp. 81-94; Pattison, George "'Who" is the Discourse? A Study in Kierkegaard's Religious Literature', *Kierkegaardiana* no. 16 (1993), pp. 28-45; Sløk, Johannes 'Das Verhältnis des Menschen zu seiner Zukunft; eine Studie über "Zwei erbauliche Reden" von S. Kierkegaard, herausgegeben am 16. Mai 1843' in *Orbis Litterarum* XVIII (1963), pp. 60-79.

cept took place in the correspondence between Wilhelm Dilthey and Count Yorck (1877-97, publ. 1923). In these letters 'historicality' serves to distinguish the temporality of existence from the course of nature, and thus to counter historical relativism and positivism. The coinage of historicality as an ontological conception came with *Being and Time* (1927). According to Heidegger, the problem of historicality (*Geschichtlichkeit*) does not arise from the fact that human life unfolds in history (*Historie*). Rather history is itself ontologically grounded in the historicality of existence. Historicality, the temporality of human existence, arises from Dasein's being-towards-death rather than from its entanglement with history.<sup>85</sup>

If the philosophical coinage of the *concept* of historicality thus belongs to Kierkegaard's posterity, the *question* of historicality nevertheless plays an important role in his writings. The following chapters will argue (1) that whilst Heidegger grounds historicality in Dasein's relation to death, Kierkegaard grounds it in the relation to the absolute Other (Chapters Three and Four), and (2) that it is this difference on the level of *existential analysis* that makes Heidegger's *fundamental ontological* project incompatible with a Kierkegaardian position (Chapter Five).

According to Kierkegaard's metaphor, the problem of historicality is, as we have seen, that of 'backwards living'. This expression implies a misrelation between the direction and the directedness of life. A historical person moves forward towards the future while facing the past. The problem of historicality thus arises from the tension between two indispensable aspects of the temporality of existence: understanding and 'living'. As understanding beings, we continually make sense of life; but life can appear meaningful only when it appears as a whole. In order to make sense of life we must therefore exclude the possibility of any essential change. Only by thus reducing the future to a mere extension of the past can we maintain ourselves in understanding. As a result, the past is not simply something that follows along after a person; it goes ahead of him, and meets him as *his* future. The future becomes a mere consequence of the past. The problem of historicality is therefore that of realizing a genuine openness towards the future.

It is here that repetition comes in. For whereas the labour of understanding or recollection consists in tracing the new back to the

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<sup>85</sup> SZ, 382-92 / BT, 434-44. Cf. Gerhard Bauer: 'Geschichtlichkeit'. *Wege und Irrwege eines Begriffs*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin 1963.

old, the moment of repetition takes place when the old becomes new. In the discourses, Job, Anna and Paul are representatives of such a temporality of repetition.

*Job: Repetition as Taking-Back*<sup>86</sup>

The Danish word for repetition, *Gentagelse*, literally means 're-taking' or 'taking back'. Job, therefore, not only exemplifies repetition in Kierkegaard, but the very meaning of this notion draws on Job's saying: 'The Lord gave, the Lord took away, blessed be the name of the Lord' (Job 1: 21). From this context it appears that 'repeating' is not simply a matter of doing again, but of receiving as a gift what seemed most obviously to belong to oneself, namely one's past.

Twice in the authorship the Job figure is depicted as a paradigm of religious transfiguration; first in the Young Man's passionate letters in the second part of *Repetition* and, less than two months later (December 1843), in the edifying discourse entitled 'The Lord Gave, the Lord Took Away, Blessed Be the Name of the Lord'. We shall consider both texts.

(1) In his letters to Constantius, the Young Man models himself on Job as a representative of the paradigm of repetition. Just as Job got everything back twofold from the Lord in the end, so the Young Man awaits a thunderstorm that will make him fit to return to his former fiancée. However, as we have seen, the Young Man deviates at the critical point. Instead of being proved right before God as Job was, he is reprieved by the circumstances; instead of being transfigured religiously he begins to live poetically. The figure of Job thus stands as an unattainable ideal in *Repetition*.

The central theme in the Young Man's interpretation of the figure of Job is the question of his being guilty. According to Job's friends, his suffering is a punishment from God because of some secret sin such as pride or arrogance. However, insisting on his own innocence, Job 'presses forward' in order to gain another understanding of his suffering. It is this resistance against any immanent explanation of his

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<sup>86</sup> Kierkegaard's interpretation of the Job figure has, among others, been studied by Hans Peter Müller ('Welt als Wiederholung. Sören Kierkegaards Novelle als Beitrag zur Hiob-Interpretation' in R. Albrecht and others (eds.) *Werden und Wirken des AT*, Göttingen 1980, pp. 355-372) and Timothy Polk (*The Biblical Kierkegaard. Reading by the Rule of Faith*, Mercer, USA 1997, pp. 153-200).

crisis that moves the Young Man so deeply. For despite his honourable motives towards his former fiancée he also seems to have become guilty since he broke his promise to her.

In the figure of Job, the concept of guilt undergoes a change. Before Job's encounter with the Lord, guilt was a problem to which Job expected the Lord to provide an explanation. But the encounter provides no such answer; rather, Job realises that the encounter itself is the explanation. The Young Man writes:

Was Job proved to be in the wrong? Yes, eternally, for there is no higher court than the one that judged him. Was Job proved to be in the right? Yes, eternally, by being proved to be in the wrong *before God*. (SKS 4, 79 / KW VI, 212)

(2) The discourse on Job develops the young man's interpretation with exceptional clarity.<sup>87</sup> As the title indicates, the discourse is an exposition of Job's exclamation, 'the Lord gave, the Lord took away; Blessed be the name of the Lord.' It falls into two parts: a prelude in which the theme is introduced, and a main section that gives a more comprehensive treatment of the subject.

The *prelude* draws a distinction between what Job said and what he did. His significance 'by no means consists in what he said but in what he did'. So, what did Job do? He *said*, 'the Lord gave, the Lord took away; blessed be the name of the Lord'. It is the fact that his saying was a doing that makes him a genuine 'prototype' for humankind, rather than its 'teacher'. Had Job been a sage who, detached from the strain of worldly cares, had exclaimed these words, he would himself only have been the 'occasion' for the manifestation of this truth in what Kierkegaard elsewhere calls a Socratic sense.<sup>88</sup> Job, however, did not simply state a proposition which he considered to be true, rather he 'worshipped, saying...' The meaning of Job's words thus depends on their performative character as worship.

<sup>87</sup> In Kierkegaard's own view this discourse attempted to depict in a more calm and edifying way what *Repetition* had depicted with unsettling passion (*Pap.* VI B 98, 52; not included in *JP*).

Unlike most of Kierkegaard's discourses, it did not remain unnoticed in his own days. In a polemical article against the prevalent misconception of a sermon as an academic exercise, Jakob Peter Mynster, the bishop of Copenhagen, pointed to this discourse as an example of 'a sermon that will refresh any sensitive heart' ('Kirkelig Polemik' in *Intelligensblade* No. 41-42, ed. by J. L. Heiberg, Copenhagen 1843-44).

<sup>88</sup> Cf. the difference between 'occasion' and 'condition' as the distinguishing criteria for the Socratic and the Christian positions in *Philosophical Fragments* (e.g., SKS 4, 222L / KW VII, 14).



The *main part* clarifies the coincidence of saying and acting in this moment of worship through a word by word exegesis of Job's saying. *The Lord gave*: Job's entire life is condensed into these words: '...he said a friendly farewell to everything all together, and in this farewell everything vanished like a beautiful recollection – indeed it was as if it were not the Lord who took it away but Job who gave it back to him'.

[He] confessed that the Lord had richly blessed his work beyond all measure; he gave thanks; therefore, the memory did not remain as a consuming restlessness. He did not conceal for himself that everything had been taken away from him; therefore, the Lord, who had taken it away, remained with his upright soul. He did not evade the thought that everything was lost; therefore, his soul remained quiet until the Lord's explanation again came to him.... (SKS 5, 123 / KW V, 118)

*The Lord took away*: The explanations which Job had received from the messengers (the lightning, the Sabeans etc.) are translated to his relationship to God. He instantly perceived that it was the Lord who had taken it away, rather than his enemies or fate. Here again Kierkegaard outlines a series of contrasting figures who do not see God and therefore succumb to the world the moment they lose what is dear to them. He, however, 'who sees the Lord has overcome the world.'

Job traced everything back to God; he did not detain his soul or quench the spirit with deliberation or explanations that only feed and foster doubt. The very moment everything was taken away from him, he knew that it was the Lord who had taken it away, and therefore in his loss he remained on good terms with the Lord, in his loss maintained intimacy with the Lord, he saw the Lord and therefore he did not see despair. (SKS 5, 125 / KW V, 121)

*Blessed be the name of the Lord*: The praise of the Lord is the sign that Job, having overcome the world by tracing everything back to God, 'remained standing' acknowledging even this overcoming as a gift. 'The Lord took everything away; then Job collected all his sorrow, as it were, and "cast it upon the Lord," and then the Lord took that away from him also, and only praise was left and in it his heart's incorruptible joy.'<sup>89</sup>

What happened with Job in this moment of worship? By translating *his* gaining and losing to the categories of *God's* giving and taking, he was able to see his past as complete. His words mark that letting go of the past through which a person becomes free for the future. The moment of worship thus signifies *completion*, not in the sense that it *fulfils* the claims of the past, but in the sense that it *silences* these claims by translating gain to gift and thereby Job's losing to God's taking.

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<sup>89</sup> SKS 5, 126 / KW V, 122.

The theme of the gift is further developed in a number of other discourses. The central point of the three discourses entitled 'Every Good and Every Perfect Gift is from Above' for instance is that whatever happens in a human life, even the most dreadful loss, is a perfect gift for the individual who receives it 'from above'.<sup>90</sup> The notion of the gift thus destroys the economy of gain and loss. In a horizontal relationship all giving is at the same time a receiving, and all receiving is a giving. But the relationship to 'the above' qualifies everything, both giving and receiving, losing and gaining, as a gift. However, the transition from the economy of gain and loss to the gift from above does not come about directly through the agency of the individual. A person who *decided* to receive everything as a gift from above would thereby inevitably reduce the gift to a gain. Only through repentance (*Anger*<sup>91</sup>) does this transition come about. Repentance, Kierkegaard writes, is that love of God which 'is more faithful and fervent than all other love, for in repentance it is God who loves you'. The transition takes place 'when you have not feared the pain of repentance and the deep grief in which a person becomes as happy as a child in God, when you have not feared to understand that this is love, not that we love God but that God loves us'.<sup>92</sup> Repentance in this sense means allowing the relationship to God to take priority over the relationship to one's own past. It thus implies that the historicity of understanding gives way for a new kind of historicity where loyalty to the past gives way for the love of God.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>90</sup> SKS 5, 39-56; 129-142; 143-158 / KW V, 31-48; 125-140; 141-159.

<sup>91</sup> It seems impossible to make a precise translation of *Anger*: If 'repentance' fails to express the essentially passive character of this concept, 'remorse' seems to make it a matter of emotion rather than will.

<sup>92</sup> SKS 5, 53 / KW V, 45f.

<sup>93</sup> This seems to be the point where Derrida's fascinating book on the gift, *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money* (tr. by Peggy Kamuf, University of Chicago Press 1992) parts company with Kierkegaard's discourses. For the gift to be possible, according to Derrida, there should not only be an effraction of the temporal circle, but this moment of effraction 'must no longer be part of time' (p. 9). 'There would be a gift only at the instant when the *paradoxical* instant (in the sense in which Kierkegaard says of the paradoxical instant of decision that it is madness) tears time apart. In this sense one would never have the time of the gift' (*ibid*). The notion of the gift implied by the discourse on Job, on the other hand, implies a relation to time. The moment of worship did not detach Job from his past, but it constituted a new relationship to the past, the relation of repentance.

Kierkegaard's notion of the 'gift from above' that is received in 'repentance' thus, in a sense, involves an answer to the problem of the gift which Derrida explores in this study. The problem is that the gift seems to be annulled as soon as it

This theme is developed in the sermon<sup>94</sup> 'The Edifying in the Thought that Before God we are Always in the Wrong' with which *Either/Or* concludes. 'There is nothing edifying in acknowledging that God is always in the right,' it is here argued. 'When you acknowledge that God is always in the right, you stand outside God, and likewise when, as a conclusion from that, you acknowledge that you are always in the wrong. But when you, not because of any preceding understanding, claim and are convinced that you are always in the wrong, then you are hidden in God. This is your adoration, your devotion, your fear of God.'<sup>95</sup> Being in the wrong, then, is the only authentic way in which a human being can incorporate the consciousness of God into his own consciousness.

Let us return to Job. In the moment of worship, he underwent a change in which *his* gaining and losing was translated into *God's* giving and *His* taking. In the paradigm of gaining and losing, the present is burdened with the past, since the past stands in need of the future for its fulfilment and completion. In the paradigm of God's giving and taking, the present is redeemed from the past, since its fulfilment and completion lies in its 'from where?', rather than in its 'what for?' The present is thus freed from the dominion of the past, not because it has fulfilled the claims of the past, but because the paradigm to which these claims belong, the economy of gain and loss, has been overcome in the moment of worship and repentance.

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comes to be seen as a gift. 'That is why, if there is a gift', Derrida writes, 'it cannot take place between two subjects exchanging objects, things or symbols. The question of the gift should therefore seek its place before any relation to the subject, before any conscious or unconscious relation to self of the subject.... There where there is subject and object, the gift would be excluded. A subject would never give an object to another subject' (p. 24). Kierkegaard's edifying discourses, one might say, point to 'repentance' and 'worship' as modes of existing in which the meaning of the gift comes to light as a kind of relationship that precedes the subject-object structure. The change that took place for Job, for example, consisted in the assurance that 'taking away' was a mode of God's self-communication. For Job God was not a subject from whom he received gifts, but the gift was God's coming to him, *the giver was the gift*.

<sup>94</sup> Following Kierkegaard's distinction we call this a sermon rather than a discourse since, in the fiction of *Either/Or*, it was written and delivered by an ordained person.

<sup>95</sup> SKS 3, 329 / KW IV, 350.

*Paul: 'The Thorn in the Flesh'*

The meaning of repentance is also an important theme in the discourse entitled 'The Thorn in the Flesh' from August 1844.<sup>96</sup> The text is Paul's description of how God sent 'a thorn in the flesh, an angel from Satan to strike him on his mouth' in order that he should not take pride in his high revelations (2 Cor 12: 1-10). The discourse is the first of a series of references to the thorn in the flesh both in Kierkegaard's published works and in his journals.<sup>97</sup> In the discourse this notion is analysed in its biblical context, whereas most of the later remarks have a deeply personal and autobiographical tone. For the purpose of this chapter I will concentrate on the understanding of a person's relation to his past in the discourse, leaving aside the important question of how and in what sense Paul's sufferings became paradigmatic for what Kierkegaard called 'my thorn in the flesh'.<sup>98</sup>

Kierkegaard distinguishes two kinds of suffering in Paul's life. On the one hand, there are the hardships that belong to human existence in general. The Apostle was well acquainted with these; he knew what it meant to be misunderstood and hated, to be imprisoned, flogged, in mortal danger etc. These were all sufferings arising from a discordance in his relation to the external world, and as such they could not frustrate his sense of being right in his cause. The thorn in the flesh, on the other hand, is a suffering in the spirit. It is distinct from all other sufferings of the Apostle's life because it arises from his relation to his own past, rather than from his relation to the external world.

<sup>96</sup> SKS 5, 317-334 / KW V, 327-346.

<sup>97</sup> In the published works: SV3 10, 139 / KW XII,1, 454; SV3 15, 125 & 132 / KW XIX, 70f. & 78; SV3 18, 123, 130 & 133 / KW XXII, 75, 83 & 86. In the journals: *Pap.* VII,1 A 126; VIII,1 A 119, 156, 185 p. 92, 205, 208, 396, 629 p. 286, 649 pp. 295f.; IX A 128, 331, 333 pp. 189-192, X,1 A 72, 322, 643; X,2 A 20, 321, 619 p. 444; X,3 A 182 p. 141f., 310, 313 p. 227, 345 p. 250; X,4 A 323 p. 184, 560 p. 379, 631; X,5 A 72, 89 pp. 104f.; XI,1 A 484 p. 375 / *JP* 5913, 6002, 6011, 6021, 6025, 4445, 2635, 374, 1123, 6183, 4368, 4370, 6323, 6396, 6468, 6492, 4993, 6603, 4654, 6659, -, -, 6769, -, -, 6837, -, 6906 ('-' indicates not given in *JP*).

<sup>98</sup> The literal meaning of the expression '*Pælen i Kødet*' perhaps conceals a hint to the biographical significance of this notion. The Danish word *Pæl* means stake, pole or peg, rather than thorn. A literal translation would thus render the expression 'the pole/peg in the flesh', rather than 'the thorn in the flesh'. A journal entry from 1849 shows Kierkegaard's awareness of the literal meaning of this expression. Referring to a passage in Lavater, he writes: 'As Paul had to have a peg [*Pæl*] in the flesh, Mary had a sword through her heart. The difference between the masculine and the feminine is very significant' (*Pap.* X, 2 A 321 / *JP* 4993).

The thorn in the flesh is the 'pain of separation'<sup>99</sup> following from the experience of a mystical union with the divine. In his rapture, Paul had been 'transfigured in God, so that the past must release him, unable to judge him'. But when he returns to his temporal self it becomes clear that 'the past has a claim upon his soul that no repentance can entirely redeem, no trusting in God can entirely wipe out, but only God himself in the inexpressible silence of the beatitude'.<sup>100</sup>

In Kierkegaard's interpretation, this 'claim of the past' had to do with Paul's time as a persecutor of the Christian church. The problem was not only the amount of evil he had done against the people of God; rather the problem was the sincerity with which he had done it. At that time Paul had persecuted the Christians as an act of worship. He is thus faced with the difficulty of having to repent what had seemed just as pleasing to God then, as his Christian worship does now. The thought of the time when he persecuted the church, therefore, does not remain behind him as a painful memory, but it confronts him as a future possibility: It might once again turn out that he has been deluded in his religious fervour. And thus, 'the past, from which the soul thought it had redeemed itself, stood there again with its demand, not as a memory, but more terrifying than ever by having conspired with the future'.<sup>101</sup>

Paul is thus struggling with the Young Man's problem, and indeed with one of the central questions in Kierkegaard's authorship before 1846: how does a person become guilty?<sup>102</sup> He is caught in Job's dilemma that he can be in the right only by being in the wrong before God. Only, the problem is here reversed: Paul *wants* to be guilty of his past in order to be able to disengage himself from it in repentance, but repentance is hindered by the fact that he acted fully in accordance with his inmost conviction.

The turning point in the discourse is the moment when Paul realises that this memory, this angel of Satan, is a messenger sent from God.

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<sup>99</sup> SKS 5, 326 / KW V, 337.

<sup>100</sup> SKS 5, 327 / KW V, 338.

<sup>101</sup> SKS 5, 332 / KW V, 344.

<sup>102</sup> *Quidam's Diary* (1845) is one long and passionate exposition of this question. The pain of the suspension indicated by the title 'Guilty?' – 'Not-Guilty?' consists not so much in the prospect that he might be the guilty party in the engagement crisis as in his inability to find a criterion by which this can be decided. What tortures him, at bottom, is uncertainty, not guilt.

When an angel of darkness arrays himself in all his terror, convinced that if he just makes Paul look at him he will petrify him..., then the apostle fixes his eye on him, he does not quickly shrink back in anxiety..., but looks at him steadfastly. The longer he looks, the more clearly he perceives that it is an emissary of God who is visiting him, a friendly spirit who wishes him well.... (SKS 5, 330 / KW V, 342)

Paul thus welcomes the memory, knowing that the pain of separation, the thorn in the flesh, does not arise from the absence of God; rather it is the way in which the eternal maintains itself in the temporal self. By giving in to the memory, in repentance, the paralysing power of the past is broken. 'Then the past remained behind; repentance held it captive, cut away the connection with it.... Faith kept the rebellious thoughts in obedience under the grace of God, which comforted the apostle beyond all measure....' (ibid.).

For Paul, as for Job, the change comes about in repentance. But what does repentance mean in this context? How can repentance bring about the affirmation of that past which it seems to negate?

To answer these questions we must start by making a distinction between regret and repentance. When a person regrets something he at once admits that it was he who did it, and that he should not have done it. This 'should not' is dictated by a self that looks back on its own actions from a later point in time. In regret, the present self resigns from those parts of its past it is unable to integrate. To regret means to drive a wedge between some past action and my present self in order to maintain a sense of the otherness of *my* past. At bottom, the self-accusation of regret is therefore a subtle self-defence; it is the price we pay for a sense of integrity.

Repentance in the Kierkegaardian sense of the word is the opposite of regret. In regret a person detaches himself from certain parts of the past in order to be able to affirm the rest of it as a meaningful whole; in repentance a person allows the iconoclastic power of the past into the present as God's messenger. *Regret is the self-preserving resentment against the past; repentance is the self-annihilating affirmation of the past.* Regret results from the conception that the truth of the self consists in its being-a-whole, repentance results from the view that being-before-God is the truth of the self. Anticipating what is to follow, we may add that the labour of regret consists in excluding the otherness that frustrates the wholeness of the self, while the gift of repentance is openness towards the other – not simple receptivity, but a being-opened, the openness of a wound.

*Anna: Patience in Expectancy*

In the discourses on Job and Paul the conflict in relation to the past was overcome in worship and repentance. In a number of other discourses this conflict is unfolded under the theme of patience and expectancy. At least one of these two key terms occurs in the titles of five of the eighteen discourses.

The discourse on Anna from March 5th, 1844, 'Patience in Expectancy', brings together themes that have been developed separately in three preceding discourses on patience and expectancy. The text, Luke 2: 33-40, depicts Anna as a witness to the presentation of the infant Jesus in the temple. Luke informs us that in her youth Anna got married after her years of virginity, and that she lived with her husband only seven years before he died. Now a widow of eighty-four, she never leaves the temple, but serves God with fasting and prayers, night and day. When she sees the child she 'praises God and tells it to everyone who expects the consolation of Jerusalem' (v. 38). In Kierkegaard's discourse, these two events, the loss of her husband and the final encounter with the Messiah, mark the boundaries of a life that embodies the meaning of patience and expectancy. It was the loss of the beloved that made Anna 'the eternal's young fiancée'.<sup>103</sup>

The connection between the failure of Anna's hopes for temporal fulfilment because of the death of her husband and her expectancy of the fullness of time is reflected even at the structural level. As is the case with many of Kierkegaard's discourses, a tight organization underlies the flowing and not very pointed style of writing. This discourse is organized on the distinction between temporal fulfilment and the fullness of time, between Anna's relation to her husband and her relation to the expected Messiah. The sections of the discourse can be divided as follows:

- (1) Prelude (SKS 5, 206-209 / KW V, 205-208).
  - 1A: Expectancy and fulfilment generally.
  - 1B: Expectancy and messianism.
- (2) Main text (209-224 / 208-225).
  - 2A: Anna's expectancy as faithfulness towards the memory of her deceased husband. (209-217 / 208-217).

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<sup>103</sup> SKS 5, 212 / KW V, 211.

1. 'Is Anna not expectant?' (211-213 / 210-213).
  2. 'Is Anna not patient in expectancy?' (213-215 / 213-215).
  3. 'Can Anna be disappointed in her expectancy?' (215-217 / 215-217).
- 2B: Anna's expectancy as her patient looking for the fullness of time or the Messiah (217-224 / 217-225).
1. 'Is Anna not expectant?' (217-219 / 218-219).
  2. 'Is Anna not patient in her expectancy?' (219-222 / 219-222).
  3. 'Was Anna disappointed in her expectancy?' (222-224 / 223-225).

(3) Conclusion: Self-annihilation as the way to authentic expectancy (224 / 225f).

Both in the prelude and in the main text, expectancy is determined from two distinct perspectives. On the one hand, it is described negatively in terms of loss or absence of fulfilment (1A & 2A); on the other hand, it is determined positively in terms of the fullness of time (1B & 2B). From the structure of the text it thus appears that expectancy and the fullness of time are inextricably bound together. Expectancy is distinct from the projections of ordinary life in that it is not concerned with temporal fulfilment, but with the fullness of time. As Kierkegaard writes, 'in the eminent sense of the word there was only one expectancy in the world, the expectancy of the fullness of time...'<sup>104</sup>

The distinction between temporal fulfilment and the fullness of time is difficult to draw. If the fullness of time is not at the same time a fulfilment of a temporal need, how can a temporal human being then maintain a relationship to it? And, conversely, if the fullness of time is but a more refined kind of temporal fulfilment, then expectancy inevitably reduces to the status of future projection. Wittgenstein captures the meaning of this distinction when he writes: 'perhaps I should not have been satisfied if my wish had been satisfied.'<sup>105</sup>

Anna exemplifies the transition from the paradigm of temporal fulfilment to the paradigm of the fullness of time. Her expectancy of the fullness of time was grounded in her loss of temporal fulfilment (her husband). But what kind of groundedness is this? Did the messiah substitute her beloved husband through an unconscious act of

<sup>104</sup> SKS 5, 218 / KW V, 219.

<sup>105</sup> *Philosophical Investigations* § 441.



sublimation? Is the expectancy of the Messiah to Anna, what poetizing was to the Young Man: the unconscious concealment of the pain of separation? According to Kierkegaard this is not the case. Rather, the loss of the beloved was the occasion for Anna to discover that her love of the husband overflowed their relationship, just as the meaning of the sacrifices of the Old Testament as prefigurations of sacrifice of the messiah overflowed the narrow confines of the temple cultus. The loss thus made it clear that their relationship had harboured a *sensus plenior* in which the husband was a *typos* of the one to come. The gap between temporal fulfilment and the fullness of time is therefore not bridged in sublimation, but in the self-realisation of expectancy.

The transition from temporal fulfilment to the fullness of time is also indicated in a number of the other discourses on expectancy and patience. In some of them expectancy and patience are described both as means of temporal fulfilment and as ends in themselves (fullness of time). Two examples can serve to clarify this distinction before we venture further into the discourse on Anna.

(1) The first of the *Eighteen Edifying Discourses*, 'Faith's Expectancy' (May 16, 1843), distinguishes wishing and expecting as two opposed ways of relating to the future. In the wish a person relates to a definite future possibility in which he seeks fulfilment. The discourse was written for New Year's Day, and Kierkegaard takes as his point of departure the tradition of expressing a wish on behalf of those who are dear to us on that occasion. This kind of wishing seems good and harmless as long as 'we do not give thought time to disturb the puzzling and vague impulses of the heart'.<sup>106</sup> But once we start considering what kind of attitude to the future is expressed in wishing, it becomes clear that this is a relation of *angst*, and that wishing itself is an aversion of the future. It seems as if the wish has been called forth by some attractive possibility, but the genealogy of the wish points to the anxiety as the origin of the projection of the wish.<sup>107</sup> The attractive force of a future possibility is a measure of the repulsive force of the possibilities it excludes. When, for example, the imagined person in the discourse wants to wish something good for his friend this is because 'he is unwilling to have the beloved slip out of his power, unwilling to surrender him to the control of the future'.<sup>108</sup> As a counter-movement

<sup>106</sup> SKS 5, 18 / KW V, 8.

<sup>107</sup> 'Angst is the form of the wish' (SKS 5, 21 / KW V, 12).

<sup>108</sup> SKS 5, 19 / KW V, 9.

to the threat of the future, wishing is the opposite of openness towards the future. Within the paradigm of the wish the meaning of the future is reduced to the fulfilment of the past, and the meaning of the past is made dependent on this fulfilment of the future.

Expectancy, on the other hand, does not relate to a definite future possibility, but to the future as such. It is not expectancy of the fulfilment of this or that temporal need, but of eternal victory. And, Kierkegaard writes, 'an expectancy of the future that expects victory has indeed conquered the future. The believer, therefore is finished with the future before he begins with the present. For what has been conquered can no longer disturb, and this victory can only make us more vigorous for the undertakings of the present.'<sup>109</sup> The believer is convinced that: 'there is an expectancy which the whole world cannot take from me; it is the expectancy of faith, and it is victory.... If I lost this expectancy, then I lost everything. But I am still victorious, victorious in my expectancy, and my expectancy is victory.'<sup>110</sup>

The relation between victory and expectancy is chiasmic: expectancy of victory is itself the victory of expectancy. Expectancy itself is the victory over the future that it expects. To this an imagined reader objects that, 'such an expectancy is a circle into which the soul is bewitched and from which it cannot escape'. Expectancy is indeed a circle, Kierkegaard answers, that prevents a person from 'falling out of himself into the manifold'. Falling out of this circle would be 'the greatest evil which could happen to a person'.<sup>111</sup>

(2) Corresponding to the distinction between wishing and expecting, the discourse 'To Gain One's Soul in Patience' (December 6, 1843) distinguishes two kinds of patience. Patience is ordinarily seen as a means to the fulfilment of the wish. The fisherman, for example, waits patiently the whole night in order to get a good haul; and the mother who longs to see her child mature spends sleepless nights and troubled days knowing that this must take its time. Their patience is the ability to endure the absence of the outcome for the sake of the outcome. Authentic patience, by contrast, cannot be separated from the outcome as the means from its end. It is not a matter of fulfilling the wish or of gaining something in the world through patience, but of gaining oneself from the world in patience. Authentic patience thus turns upside down the relationship between the self/soul and the

<sup>109</sup> SKS 5, 28f. / KW V, 19.

<sup>110</sup> SKS 5, 32 / KW V, 24.

<sup>111</sup> SKS 5, 32 / KW V, 23.

world. The task is not to gain the world, but to gain oneself from the world.

A person was in the first moment of his life closer than ever to that which people strive for, that is, to possess the world; at that time his soul was lost in it, and possessed the world in itself, just as the beat of the waves possesses the restlessness and the deep motions of the sea, and knows no other heartbeat than that of the infinite sea.... The world can be possessed only when it possesses me.... (SKS 5, 164 / KW V, 164)

Since the soul is possessed by a foreign power in such a way that its own power belongs to the foreign power, the individual can only patiently 'receive himself from the world through God'. Patience is a mode of being in the world which resists the ownership of the world, not by force, but by endurance, (*Taalmod* literally means enduring courage). The effect of patience is captured in the following passage:

[I]t is all a repetition. It is not a question of making a conquest, of hunting and seizing something, but of becoming more and more quiet, because that which is to be gained is there within oneself, and the trouble is that one is outside oneself, and because that which is to be gained is in patience, not concealed in it so that the person who patiently stripped off its leaves, so to speak, would finally find it deep inside, but in such a way that patience itself is a web in which the soul spins itself and thereby gains patience and itself. (SKS 5, 169 / KW V, 170f.)

The notions of expectancy and patience thus transcend the distinction between the means and the end, the way and the goal: expectancy is fulfilment, patience is the gain, the way is the goal. The structure of postponement that characterizes the wish is hereby overcome. In the paradigm of the wish, the present is a means for the fulfilment of a wish. The wishing person is therefore always ahead of himself; he is with the fulfilment, and from this point he comes back to his factual self with the sense of impatience. In patience and expectancy a person comes back to himself, and regains that contemporaneity with oneself which was lost in the wish.

Let us return to Anna. We have already noted that the structure of the discourse is determined by the distinction between temporal fulfilment and the fullness of time. This distinction corresponds to that between wish and expectancy, inauthentic and authentic patience. The wish reaches its end point in the moment of its fulfilment; expectancy, by contrast, is not directed towards any particular future possibility, but towards the moment when everything becomes new, the fullness of time. Anna exemplifies the transition from wishing something in the world to expecting the appearance of the eternal in the world.

In Anna's case this transition is connected with her faithfulness to the memory of her deceased husband.

Anna had not demanded the world's comfort for the one dead; then heaven comforted her and the memory of the lost one formed her heart to descry the expected one, not only for herself, but for the whole nation... [she] gave up the temporal in order to gain the eternal and then was favoured with the vision of eternity as an expectancy in time [or: as something expected in time]. (SKS 5, 217 / KW V, 217f.)

The connection between loss and expectancy deserves close attention. It seems at first that the memory of the lost beloved would have the effect that Anna ceased to be expectant. For her husband is dead, and in remembering him Anna relates to something that is finished. Yet by remaining faithful to the deceased beloved she would remain faithful to her own love. Through the loss of its object her love underwent a change, a purification, in which it was liberated from the economy of gaining and losing, and from the temporality of the wish. A dead person does not respond to any acts of love, nor does he complain when he is not lovingly remembered. He *is* not; to remember him lovingly is not to love him, but to let him be an occasion for love to unfold itself in the person who remembers.<sup>112</sup> It was therefore precisely the impossibility of temporal fulfilment that 'formed her heart to descry the expected one'. Anna's faithful memory of her deceased husband thus made her expect the fullness of time rather a new temporal fulfilment of her hopes.

Significantly, Kierkegaard chose a woman as the figure of expectancy. For the essence of the female is, according to *Anti-Climacus*, abandonment; only by abandoning herself to another being is a woman a self. A male, on the other hand, is unable to abandon himself completely to another being. But in relation to the eternal both male and female can be themselves only in abandonment.<sup>113</sup> Given this view of the feminine, Anna's loss has a special significance. She not only lost her husband, she also lost herself, and her expectancy was therefore of an other in relation to whom she could be a self.

The two decisive events of Anna's life, the death of her husband and the coming of the messiah, make her a model of 'patience in expectancy'. Her faithfulness to the memory of her deceased husband formed Anna's time experience in such a way that, in Walter Benjamin's phrase, 'every moment was that little gate through which the Messiah could enter'.<sup>114</sup> For since the horizon of future projection

<sup>112</sup> Cf. the discourse 'The Work of Love in Recollecting One Who is Dead' in *Works of Love* (SV3 12, 329-341 / KW XVI, 345-358).

<sup>113</sup> SV3 15, 105-107 / KW XIX, 49f.

<sup>114</sup> 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte' (1940) in *Sprache und Geschichte. Philosophische Essays*, Stuttgart 1992, p. 154 / 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' in *Illumina-*

was closed, Anna could no longer hope for something future, but only for a new future. She could no longer wish that something new would happen *in time*, but only expect that something new would happen *to time*. So when near the end of her life the promised child appears before her, and she takes him in her arms, she, 'the eternal's young fiancée', is herself embraced by her beloved.

### *Transfiguration is the Explanation*

The three figures who have been analysed in this chapter all embody the problem of achieving authentic historicity understood as openness towards the future. Certain experiences obstructed their prospects and made them unable to understand the meaning of their lives as an extension of their past. The inexplicability of these experiences had the effect of suspending the future until an explanation of the past had been reached. They needed this explanation in order to make sense of their lives, and thus to know what life it was they should go on living.

However, none of them found the explanation they were looking for. The insight that set them free was not an explanation in the sense that it provided a vantage point from which they could consider their life as a whole. Rather the explanation was that *it was God* who denied them the explanation, that the truth of their lives did not depend on its character of wholeness, but on its being before God.

This point is captured in the last of the *Eighteen Edifying Discourses* with the distinction between explanation [*Forklaring*] and transfiguration [*Forklarelse*]. *Forklarelse* is the passive of *Forklaring*; it literally means 'being explained', but in ordinary usage it means transfiguration. The very title of the discourse gives a hint to the meaning of this distinction: 'One Who Prays Aright Struggles in Prayer and Is Victorious – in that God Is Victorious'.<sup>115</sup>

The discourse depicts three different attitudes to God in prayer. The person who lives in the realm of the wish tries to win God for the wish by explaining himself, and the importance of what he is praying for. For such a person, praying is a means of wish fulfilment. A truly religious person, by contrast, seeks God in order to find the

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*tions. Essays and Reflections*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, tr. by Harry Zohn, New York, 1968, p. 264.

<sup>115</sup> SKS 5, 361-381 / KW V, 377-401.

explanation, that is, he seeks the point from which it appears that what he has gone through has been beneficial. But even this prayer is caught in a misunderstanding, since it sees God as a means for the explanation, rather than the explanation itself. Only he prays aright who through his prayer is reconciled with the inexplicability of life. For a person praying thus, the explanation is that 'God only wants that mutual understanding [*den Forstaaelse med ham*] which is in the realm of the inexplicable [*det Uforstaaelige*]'.<sup>116</sup> In prayer God does not give him an explanation he can subsequently apply to his life, but the explanation lies *in* the praying attitude in such a way that it cannot be taken over by the understanding. For the prayerful person the truth of his life does not depend on his ability to understand himself, but on his submitting his own understanding to God's providence.

The difference between explaining and being explained (transfigured) is depicted in the image of the sea and the sky.

When the ocean is exerting all its power, that is precisely the time when it cannot reflect the image of heaven, and even the slightest motion blurs the image; but when it becomes still and deep, then the image of heaven sinks into its nothingness... [W]as it not a victory that instead of receiving an explanation [*Forklaring*] from God he was transfigured [*forklaret*] in God, and his transfiguration [*Forklarelse*] is this: to reflect the image of God. (*SKS* 5, 380 / *KW* V, 399f.)

The three figures that have been analysed in this chapter all illustrate the transition from explanation to transfiguration, and from understanding to worship. For Job, the moment of worship translated his life from the paradigm of his gaining and losing to God's giving and taking. By frustrating his self-understanding as an apostle, Paul's memory of his past as a persecutor of the church made him rest in the sufficiency of grace. And Anna's loss of her husband similarly helped her to experience the fullness of time rather than to seek temporal fulfilment.

### *Repetition and the Form of the Discourses*

The conception of authentic historicity embodied in these figures of faith does not easily lend itself to abstract thinking. Rather the notions of repentance, expectancy, transfiguration etc. demand an 'overturning of thought and speech'.<sup>117</sup> It is not simply a matter of putting

<sup>116</sup> *SKS* 5, 376 / *KW* V, 395.

<sup>117</sup> *SKS* 5, 162 / *KW* V, 162.

forth a religious explanation in contrast to philosophical ones; for the religious belongs to the realm of transfiguration [*Forklarelse*] rather than explanation [*Forklaring*]. The task is rather to communicate the religious in such a way that it does not reduce to the realm of explanation. Kierkegaard's religious discourses, therefore, do not primarily develop certain religious truths; the author does not *speak about* expectancy or repentance to his listener, but he *speaks forth* these attitudes in him. He does not propose a developed concept of patience, but he calls his listener back to patience. Only by thus making the truth of the discourse depend on the reader's appropriation can it be maintained that transfiguration is the explanation.

The significance of the text-reader relationship in Kierkegaard's discourses has been brought out by George Pattison in a series of important essays.<sup>118</sup> In "'Who' is the Discourse?" he analyses the imagery of the prefaces to *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*.<sup>119</sup> With different metaphors each preface describes the author's bidding the book farewell. The book is, for example, depicted as a wanderer who 'enclosed in himself' walks on silent paths until he meets 'that single individual whom I [the author] with joy and gratitude call *my* reader'. The moment the book has been received by this reader its mission has been fulfilled, and it 'disappears, happy never to return home again – and this is precisely the joy of him who sent it, who continually comes to the reader only to bid him farewell'.<sup>120</sup> In this way the author here withdraws from his text, thus making the discourse dependent on its reader for its meaning. This dependence, however, is not that of the extreme reader response resulting from 'the death of the author'. Rather the author's withdrawal from the text is the means by which he prepares the way for the reader's own resolve. By creating a space in which the reader's response becomes decisive, the author's withdrawal is thus, paradoxically, the means by which he reaches out for his reader. The discourse, we might say, is 'the between' created by the author in relation to his reader. Despite the fact that Kierkegaard placed his own name on the title page of the discourses, he is therefore no more present as an author in them than in his pseudonymous works. 'The double substitution of Speaker and Discourse performs an analogous function to that of the editor/writer

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<sup>118</sup> Cf. the first note of this chapter.

<sup>119</sup> "'Who' is the Discourse? A Study in Kierkegaard's Religious Literature' in *Kierkegaardiana* 16, Copenhagen 1993, pp. 28-45.

<sup>120</sup> *SKS* 5, 289 / *KW* V, 295.

duality in the pseudonymous works in facilitating the decisive existential appropriation of the text by the reader'.<sup>121</sup> There is, however, also an important disanalogy between the structures of communication in the discourses and in the pseudonymous writings. In both cases the withdrawal of the author serves the function of creating the space in which the reader as a substitute for the absent author, can appropriate the existential possibility depicted in the text. But while the voice of the pseudonyms speaks *to* their readers, the voice of the discourses speak *through* them.

This unique relationship between text and reader, speaker and listener in the discourse, brings into light the essential difference between the form of the experiment (e.g. in *Repetition*) with that of the discourse. We noted in Chapter One that on one level Constantius' project in *Repetition* disintegrates, while, on another level, a new project is implied precisely by this disintegration. By resigning from his project, Constantius does not simply bring it to an end, but he hands it over to his reader. This ambiguity was consistent, it was argued, with Climacus' definition of the genre of the experiment as 'the conscious, teasing withdrawal of communication'. In the same section of the *Postscript*, Climacus describes the nature of religious communication. Here the relationship between writer and reader is such that the reader does not '*directly reproduce*' what has been said as an 'echo' in his own thought, but '*inwardly repeats* it' so that it 'resounds' in him. In religious discourses it must be true that 'what is said belongs to the recipient as if it were his own – and indeed it *is* now his own'.<sup>122</sup> Unlike the author of an 'experiment', the religious writer does not recall his communication, but he withdraws himself from the text in such a way that, in the moment of appropriation, the text becomes, in K. Olesen Larsen's phrase, 'the reader's conversation with himself by means of the speaker'.<sup>123</sup>

The point becomes clearer when we consider the image of the theater which Kierkegaard several times employs to depict the problem of communication. In a well-known passage from *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard uses this image to bring home the inadequacy of aesthetic communication. It reads: 'In a theatre it happened that a fire started offstage. The clown came out to tell the audience. They

<sup>121</sup> Pattison op. cit., p. 40.

<sup>122</sup> SV3 9, 217 / KW XII,1, 260, my italics.

<sup>123</sup> Søren Kierkegaard læst af K. Olesen Larsen 1-2, Copenhagen 1966, vol 2, p. 94.



thought it was a joke and applauded. He told them again, and they became still more hilarious.’<sup>124</sup>

In the ‘Occasional Discourse’, known in the anglophone world as ‘Purity of Heart’, we find a kind of counterimage in which the relationship of spectatorship is reversed. The religious reader is here not a spectator, but the actor, and the writer or speaker is his prompter. Kierkegaard writes:

[T]he speaker whispers the words to the listener, but the main thing, the earnestness is that the listener, with the help of the discourse and before God, in silence speaks in himself, with himself, to himself.... In the theatre the performance is played before persons present who are called spectators, but at the religious address God himself is present; in the most earnest sense he is the spectator who is checking on how it is being heard, and for that very reason there are no spectators. (SV3 11, 115 / KW XV, 124)

When we compare these two versions of the image of the theatre we get an impression of the nature of the religious discourse. The teasing withdrawal of communication in the ‘experiment’ corresponds to the clown. Though Constantius tries to communicate something that concerns the actual existence of his readers this communication breaks down because his relation to the reader is that of aesthetic spectatorship. The discourses, by contrast, place the reader before God, not, however, in the sense that God is the object of his consideration, but in the sense that he sees himself as being seen by God. The relationship between author and reader is thereby changed: if in the paradigm of the aesthetic, the writer speaks *to* his reader, in the religious paradigm he speaks *through* him (though not in a manipulative sense).

This difference is captured in the epithet *opbyggelig*, ‘edifying’, literally, ‘upbuilding’. In *Works of Love* (1847) Kierkegaard points out that building up means building from the ground.<sup>125</sup> This ground is love. Love, however, is not a quality in the individual as such, but a ‘quality by which or in which you are for others’. ‘Love is to presuppose love, to have love is to presuppose love in others; to be loving is to presuppose that others are loving.’ According to this key passage, the edifying method (if that is the appropriate word) consists in *communicating by presupposing*. The task of the edifying discourse is to presuppose love, expectancy, patience etc. in the reader, rather than to present these notions for him as ideals. By accepting these presuppositions the reader turns into the kind of person the discourse addresses. The discourse therefore does not communicate anything new

<sup>124</sup> SKS 2, 39 / KW III, 30.

<sup>125</sup> SV3 12, 210 / KW XVI, 216f.

to the reader, but it calls him back from his diversion in the world to being-before-God as the ground of his being.

We have traced the notion of authentic historicality in *Eighteen Edifying Discourses*. I have argued that the concept of authentic historicality implicit in the Kierkegaardian conceptions of repentance, expectancy, and transfiguration is different from the historicality of understanding. According to these conceptions the truth of the self does not consist in its being-a-whole, but in its being-before-God. Hereby it has been indicated that the question of historicality can be grasped only in terms of the question of the other. To this question we must now turn.



## Part Two

### The Question of the Other

The first two chapters of this study have attempted to draw a distinction between two kinds of historicity. On the one hand, there is the historicity of understanding or recollection. Since in this paradigm the truth of the self depends on its being-a-whole, the task is to integrate the past into the present self. By understanding oneself exclusively on the basis of one's past, the future is reduced to a mere extension of that past. Using Kierkegaard's metaphorical language, we have designated this mode of existing 'backwards living'. In the historicity of repetition, on the other hand, the truth of the self consists in its relation to the absolute Other, its being-before-God. The goal is therefore not an affirmation of the past in which a person sees himself as complete, but an openness towards the future in which the meaning of the self depends upon a relationship that transcends the immanence of the past.

Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* exemplifies the historicity of understanding while Kierkegaard's edifying discourses represent a historicity of repetition. If, for Kierkegaard, the authentic relation to the future is determined as expectancy, for Heidegger this relation is determined as anticipatory resoluteness. And if Heidegger's notion of anticipatory resoluteness is based on his analysis of Dasein's relation to death as Dasein's ownmost possibility,<sup>126</sup> Kierkegaard's concept of expectancy is grounded in the relation to the absolute Other. The expectant person is not only waiting for something new to happen in addition to the old; his expectancy is the redemption of the past through the future, the newness of the old – repetition. The task is now to clarify the notion of the other implied by Kierkegaard's category of repetition, and thereby also to bring out the distinction between the two kinds of historicity.

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<sup>126</sup> SZ, 305-310 & 382f. / BT, 352-358 & 434.

There is a children's story in Denmark about a child, Palle, who wakes up one morning and realises that he is alone in the world.<sup>127</sup> Filled with excitement he goes out into town and does everything that his parents had forbidden him to do. He begins quite innocently by walking on the grass where it is prohibited, then he steals from a candy shop, starts driving a town bus, etc. In the end he enters an aeroplane, and sets off in direction of the moon. The plane crashes, he screams – wakes up, and realises that he lies in his bed. He can hear his mother rushing to his bedroom. This story indicates how the question of historicity and the question of the other combine. What was it Palle was seeking when he went from one diversion to the other? It seems that he was seeking two things. On one level he was seeking fulfilment for all his unrealized wishes, on another level he was in search of his home and his lost parents. Wish fulfilment was a means of surviving in a world that had lost its *Heimlichkeit*. In this way, the temporality of the wish is seen as resulting from a repressed sense of loss or alienation. Kierkegaard's genealogy of historicity, I shall argue, points to the relation to the other as the origin of the temporality of existence.

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<sup>127</sup> Jens Sigsgaard *Palle alene i verden* (1942).

## Chapter Three

### Time as the Trace of the Other

This chapter suggests an interpretation of one sentence from *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844). It reads: 'Only in the moment of vision [Øieblikket] does history begin.'<sup>128</sup>

If the word *Øieblikket* was here employed in the everyday sense of 'instant' or 'moment', this sentence would yield little more than the claim that history must begin abruptly. But on the preceding pages Vigilius Haufniensis, the pseudonymous author of *The Concept of Anxiety*, has coined this term in a new way, in accordance with its literal meaning. Literally, *Øieblikket* means the glance or the gaze of an eye (not, as the Princeton translation renders it, 'the blink of an eye'). When Haufniensis writes that history only begins in *Øieblikket*, he is not just claiming that the history of the individual begins in a decisive moment, he further describes the birthplace of individuality as the point when the eye starts reaching out. In order to understand the significance of this claim, we shall first consider the context in which it appears.

#### *The Parts of Time*

The sentence is taken from the notoriously difficult opening section of Chapter Three of *The Concept of Anxiety*. The two first chapters of this book have explored the notion of spirit as the synthesis of soul

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<sup>128</sup> SKS 4, 392 / KW VIII, 89. The notion of the moment of vision has been explored widely in the secondary literature, but usually on the basis of *Philosophical Fragments* rather than the *Concept of Anxiety*, Chapter Three. An overview of interpretations of this notion is given by Hermann Deuser in *Kierkegaard. Die Philosophie des religiösen Schriftstellers* pp. 43-57. The section on sexuality and history in Arne Grøn's *Begrebet Angst hos Søren Kierkegaard* is of particular interest in this context. Cf. also Mark C. Taylor *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship. A Study of Time and the Self*, Princeton 1975.

and body. To this determination is now added the moment of vision, *Øieblikket*, as the synthesis of the temporal and the eternal. The decisive pages of this section<sup>129</sup> are structured on the ancient question of the parts of time: time consists of past, future and present; but the past is no more, the future is not yet, and the present is only a borderline between these two realms with no temporal extension of its own. The obvious conclusion seems to be that time does not exist.<sup>130</sup> Haufniensis now suggests three ways in which this classical paradox can be dealt with: either one attempts to apprehend the parts of time on the basis of time alone, or on the basis of the eternal, or on the basis of the temporality of existence (the moment of vision). His argument seems to go as follows:

(1) *The reality of the parts of time cannot be grounded in time itself.* For time is an infinite succession, and as such it provides 'no foothold', no fixed point from which a borderline can be drawn between past and future. Haufniensis distinguishes two ways of perceiving time: abstract thinking and imagination [*Forestillingen*]. Imagination spatializes the moment so that it seems as if the infinite succession was brought to a halt in a moment of presence. But in abstract thinking it becomes clear that this halt is not a genuine presence, but a presence 'infinitely void of content'. For a world that was 'in time' would be an infinite continuum with no presence. As long as time is understood in isolation from eternity as pure succession, it therefore inevitably coincides with space. 'For abstract thinking time and space are absolutely identical.'<sup>131</sup> Haufniensis illustrates the difference between abstract thinking and imagination with a myth of an Indian

<sup>129</sup> SKS 4, 388-393 / KW VIII, 85-90.

<sup>130</sup> The paradox of the parts of time dates back at least to Aristotle's *Physics*: 'Some of it [time] has happened and does not exist, and some of it is in the future and does not yet exist; these constitute both an infinite stretch of all time and the time that is with us at any moment; but it would appear impossible for anything which consists of things that do not exist to exist in itself' (217b32-33). This *aporia* has been developed by McTaggart in his celebrated argument for the unreality of time (reprinted in *The Philosophy of Time*, ed. by R. L. Poidevin & M. MacBeath, Oxford UP 1995, pp. 23-34). The solution that Haufniensis suggests to this problem points beyond what is usually called the philosophy of time. For his point is that time cannot be understood in and for itself, but only in its relation to the eternal, indeed, only *as* the relation to the eternal. Haufniensis' conception of the moment of vision does therefore not lend itself to comparison with modern analytical theories of time, but it challenges the assumptions of such theories. His analysis of the paradox of the parts of time points in the direction of the tradition from Bergson and Heidegger rather than that from McTaggart and Arthur N. Prior.

<sup>131</sup> SKS 4, 389n / KW VIII, 86n.

line of kings that lasted 70,000 years. Nothing is known about the kings apart from this indication of time. For abstract thought the sense of the immensity of this span of time vanishes, while imagination tries to see it happening in space. This, however, is impossible since there is no content to all these years. Imagination thus 'stares in a nothing which is infinitely empty of content'.<sup>132</sup> In relation to an empty span of time, imagination thus demonstrates how time reduces to space.

(2) *The meaning of the parts of time cannot be grounded on the eternal alone.* If time is defined as infinite succession without foothold, the eternal is understood as the negation of this succession. For abstract thought it is the standstill (as opposed to time's passing by). Imagination, on the other hand, views the eternal as an eternal presence, 'a progression which does not get anywhere'.<sup>133</sup> In both views the eternal has no parts. There is nothing past, and nothing to come, and everything that is, is in the fullness of the present. This means that the reality of the parts of time cannot be grounded in eternity either.

(3) *The meaning of the parts of time comes into light only when the concept of time is grounded in the temporality of existence, the moment of vision.* Haufniensis writes: 'The moment of vision is that ambiguity in which time and eternity touch each other, and with this the concept of *temporality* is posited, whereby time constantly intersects eternity and eternity constantly pervades time. As a result, the above mentioned division acquires its significance: the present time, the past time, the future time.'<sup>134</sup> Haufniensis thus grounds the reality of the parts of time neither on succession (time), nor on the unchanging (the eternal), but on the moment in which time enters into a conflict with the eternal. Objective time is grounded in the temporality of existence, rather than the other way around.

This notion of temporality conveys a new meaning to the parts of time. The future is 'the incognito in which the eternal, even though it is incommensurable with time, nevertheless maintains its relation with time'.<sup>135</sup> As the relation to the eternal, the future takes priority over the past and the present. If in the Greek paradigm, the past

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<sup>132</sup> SKS 4, 389 / KW VIII, 86.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> SKS 4, 392 / KW VIII, 89.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.



took precedence over the future, in the paradigm of the moment of vision 'the future is the whole of which the past is a part.'<sup>136</sup>

For Haufniensis, the moment of vision thus becomes what the category of repetition was for Constantius: a distinguishing mark for the Christian view over against the Greek view.<sup>137</sup> The Greeks did not know the moment of vision for their 'eternity lies behind as the past, that can only be entered backwards'.<sup>138</sup> Only with the Christian notion of the fullness of time as the qualification of time through the intersection of the eternal is the moment of vision posited.<sup>139</sup>

This, in brief, is the flow of the argument in this passage. By grounding the notion of time in the moment of vision rather than on the apparent in-timeness of existence, Haufniensis not only provides an answer to the question of the *reality* of the parts of time, but the traditional understanding of the *meaning* of the parts of time is in-

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Haufniensis makes the connection between repetition and the moment of vision explicit in a footnote (SKS 4, 393n / KW VIII, 90n).

<sup>138</sup> SKS 4, 393 / KW VIII, 90.

<sup>139</sup> Haufniensis illustrates the difference between the Greek forgetfulness of time and the decisiveness of the moment in Christianity in two footnotes. The first note describes plastic art as the natural culmination of Greek culture. The sculptures produced in this culture were, according to Haufniensis, blind and motionless because the Greeks did not have the notion of spirit, and therefore did not grasp in a deeper sense the significance of temporality and sensuality (SKS 4, 391n / KW VIII, 87n). The other note describes, by way of contrast, a comical sketch that was by two actors in the streets of Copenhagen. They stepped forth, placed themselves opposite to each other, and then began to pantomime some passionate conflict. When the mimical act was in full swing and the spectator's eyes followed the story with expectation of what was to follow, they suddenly stopped and remained motionless as though petrified in the mimical expression of the moment. The effect of this can be exceedingly comical because the moment in an accidental way becomes commensurable for the eternal...the comical consisted in the fact that the accidental was eternalized. (SKS 4, 391n / KW VIII, 88n) Haufniensis thus depicts two conflicting views of how identity appears in succession, and how the eternal becomes manifest in the temporal. If the sculptures in Greek culture, beautiful and balanced, freed from the strain of everyday concern represent a retreat from temporality, the street actors makes the eternal appear precisely by becoming absorbed in the temporal. And thus, if the Greek sculptures represent the eternal behind the temporal, the street actors represent the coming into being of the eternal in the temporal. In these notes Haufniensis describes how in the course of history Christianity has changed our time experience. Temporality has a different meaning in 'Christian' Europe than it did for the Greeks. This difference is rooted in the historicizing of the eternal and the eternalizing of the historical in the incarnation. (Cf. Auerbach's *Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der Abendländischen Literatur*, Bern & München 1982).

verted. For according to the temporality of the moment of vision the eternal resides with the future rather than with the past. The past, therefore, depends on and belongs to the future in a more primordial way than the future depends on the past.

But what is the moment of vision? How is it to be conceived on the basis of the eternal? In what sense is it the beginning of history? In order to answer these questions we must consider Haufniensis' interpretation in the light of the literal meaning of *Øieblikket* as the glance of an eye.

### *The Glance of Ingeborg and the Moment of Vision*

In the central passage of this section Haufniensis interprets the moment of vision as a metaphor. He writes:

'The moment of vision' [*Øieblikket*] is a metaphorical expression, and as such it is difficult to deal with. However, it is a beautiful word to consider. Nothing is as swift as the glance of the eye, and yet it is commensurable for the content of the eternal. Thus when Ingeborg gazes out over the sea after Frithiof, this is a picture of what is expressed in this metaphorical word. An outburst of her emotion, a sigh or a word has already, as a sound, more of the determination of time and is more present in the direction of disappearing, and there is not so much of the presence of the eternal in it. For this very reason, a sigh, a word etc. have power to relieve the soul of its burden, precisely because that which burdens it begins to be something of the past the moment it has been pronounced. A glance is therefore a designation of time, but note well, time in the fateful conflict when it is touched by eternity. (*SKS* 4, 390f / *KW* VIII, 87)

Haufniensis here indicates what kind of glance is implied by his notion of *Øieblikket*, viz. the glance of Ingeborg.

Ingeborg is a key figure in Esaias Tegner's *Frithiof's Saga*, a popular romantic recreation of a Norse saga (Sweden 1825).<sup>140</sup> Though not of royal birth, Frithiof is brought up with the king's daughter Ingeborg. From an early age a deep sense of mutual belonging develops between the uneven playmates. In Ingeborg's words:

Frithiof I love: – so long as I remember  
Through all my life days Frithiof have I loved.  
That love is the twin soul of mine own self:  
I know not its beginning – cannot even  
Conceive the time when it existed not.

<sup>140</sup> The following references are given to *Frithiof's Saga*, tr. by C. D. Locock, London 1924.

As the fruit sets about its core, and grows  
And ripens out to the full golden orb  
In the summer sunshine, so I too have grown  
And ripened round that kernel, till my being  
Seems but a shell and casing for my love. (p. 49)

After the death of the king, Frithiof applies for Ingeborg's hand, but her brothers scornfully refuse and send him to the Orkneys to collect tax as a punishment for his impertinence. While he is away they plan to force Ingeborg into marriage with another man. She knows all this, but she dares not tell it to Frithiof. At their last secret meeting Frithiof suggests that they should escape from Sweden and travel to Greece where they could live together in undisturbed happiness. But Ingeborg rejects this plan as impossible and undignified for the king's daughter. Frithiof then promises that as soon as he comes back from the Orkneys he will ask for her hand again. Then he takes leave, and Ingeborg is left on her own with her terrible secret. After this separation there is only one place where her tormented soul finds rest: at the seashore where she stands gazing over the foaming sea in the direction where her beloved disappeared.

To the ocean  
Turn I my gaze – there was it that thy ship  
Clove toward the longing watcher on the shore  
Her foaming path...  
I ask the day, where has she seen thy face:  
I ask the night, – they answer not: the sea  
That bears thee on her bosom answereth not  
Save with a murmuring sigh along the shore. (p. 61)

There are two layers in Ingeborg's loss. Frithiof has departed from her not to return before she will have been married to another man. In itself this would be a dreadful loss; but if they had been able to face this prospect together they would still somehow belong together. But now Frithiof was separated from Ingeborg by the secret she did not share with him. She did not even have the consolation of being understood by him in his absence. She had been separated from Frithiof from the moment she found herself unable to share with him her fate. In the last resort their relationship is not severed because of his absence, nor because of her prospects of getting married, but because of her inability to communicate the one important thing to him.

What did Ingeborg lose when she lost Frithiof? For Ingeborg the loss of Frithiof did not merely mean the loss of the object of her love. It was rather, in her own imagery, the loss of her 'kernel'. The image is revealing: The point is not that with the loss of Frithiof she lost everything apart from some naked self; but it was precisely that naked self, that inner core of personality, which had gone with Frithiof. What remained was but the 'shell' and the 'casing'. A shell is not merely a surface with no content; it is designed for a content, and therefore, in some sense, designed by its content. An empty shell is therefore not meaningless; its emptiness is meaningful as a trace of the content which brought it into being.

It would seem that for Ingeborg the loss of Frithiof was the loss of her other; but the image of the kernel shows that the opposite is the case. The loss of her 'other' is precisely his coming into being as a genuine other. Before the loss his presence had been constitutive of her self, supplying its meaning; now *his absence* becomes constitutive of a new mode of existence in which his being is not simply the one pole in the polarity of her self, but a genuine other.

And Ingeborg's glance? It gazes on that point in the horizon where she saw him for the last time. Is it a means of re-presentation? Is she recollecting? There would be no relief in memory; it would only contain a reminder of the unbridgability of the gulf that separates them. Is it projection? Is her glance nourished by the wish that suddenly Frithiof's ship will, miraculously, reappear on the horizon? Such a wish would only engender impatience and unrest. Gazing over the sea, Ingeborg, therefore, is neither recalling the past, nor does her glance penetrate into the possibilities of the future. Rather, her glance has the form of a question: 'has she [the day, the sea] seen thy face?' She asks the day, the night, and the sea – but the question is directed to Frithiof (in the second person). The face she is looking for is not 'his' but 'thy' – as if he was present despite the absence of his face; as if his absence harbours a kind of presence. Her 'looking for', we might say, precedes the intentionality of the subject-object structure of language. She is not looking for an object; she is looking for a change. In the terminology from the preceding chapter: Her glance belongs to the realm of expectancy, rather than that of the wish, to the fullness of time rather than temporal fulfilment. It does not trace the other; it is the trace of the other.

Ingeborg's glance thus expresses the dialectic of the other: The ineluctable absence of the other – the otherness of the other – is precisely the presence of other as other. Time or temporality is the

wound with which the other, precisely by becoming other, has marked the self: the umbilical cord of consciousness. It is in this sense that I define it, with an expression from Lévinas, as 'the trace of the other'.

It is both impossible and unnecessary to decide precisely how much of this narrative context is brought into play when the moment of vision is explained by means of Ingeborg's glance. A sufficient basis for our interpretation is provided by Haufniensis' statement that the meaning of the moment of vision is mirrored in her glance.<sup>141</sup> The task is now to indicate the sense in which time is grounded in the moment of vision understood on the basis of Ingeborg's glance. Two observations concerning Haufniensis' use of the image of Ingeborg's glance in this passage can help to answer this question.

(1) The first thing to note is that the moment of vision is depicted as the glance of a woman. Kierkegaard often employs the image of the love relationship, but often he regards it from a male perspective. In the 'Seducer's Diary', for instance, the glance plays an important role, but always as the glance with which the male mirrors himself in the woman.<sup>142</sup> When he looks at a woman he does not encounter another person, but a possibility of his own personality. This is consistent with the Seducer's conception of the feminine as 'being for other'.<sup>143</sup> In making her sense his gaze, the Seducer proposes himself as her other, i.e. as the meaning, the upon-which of her life. His gaze forces her to look upon him as *her* other. '[B]eing for other is always a matter of the glance of an eye [*Øieblikkets Sag*]', the Seducer writes, '...when it takes place, what was originally being for other as-

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<sup>141</sup> The notion 'Ingeborg's glance' occurs twice in Kierkegaard's early journals entries (1836). First, in a series of entries on the essence of romanticism as distinct from classicism. A truly romantic situation, Kierkegaard writes, is that of Ingeborg sitting at the seashore and following with her eyes the disappearing Frithiof on the sea (*Pap. I A 136 / JP 3800*). Classicism, the preceding entry states, is an improper fraction between the ideal and the actual; romanticism always has carried numbers (*Pap. I A 135 / JP 16*). Second, in Kierkegaard's notes on Mozart's Don Juan where the immediacy of the page is contrasted to the romantic melancholy of Ingeborg's glance (*Pap. I C 125, p. 304 / JP 4397*).

Two steps in Kierkegaard's employment of this image can thus be distinguished.

(1) In the entries from 1836, the glance of Ingeborg was interpreted as the expression of the essence of romanticism and modernity over against classicism or antiquity. (2) *The Concept of Anxiety* employs the image in such a way that temporality is seen as the distinguishing mark of modernity over against the Greeks.

<sup>142</sup> *SKS* 2, 305f. / *KW* III, 315f.

<sup>143</sup> *SKS* 2, 417-420 / *KW* III, 429-433.

sumes a relative being, and it is all over'.<sup>144</sup> We are not here investigating the Seducer's demonic encroachment upon the feminine other, but his notion of the feminine as being for other (though these questions are, of course, not fully separable). This notion is confirmed and deepened in the long note on the feminine in *The Sickness unto Death* to which I referred earlier. Here 'the nature of woman' is defined as abandonment [*Hengivelse*]:

In the moment of abandonment she has lost her self, and only in this way is she happy, only in this way is she herself.... A man also abandons himself... but his self is not abandonment... neither does he gain his self through abandonment, as a woman does in another sense; he *has* himself. He abandons himself, but his self remains behind as a sober awareness of this abandonment, whereas the woman in a truly feminine way plunges herself, plunges herself into that to which she abandons herself. (SV3 15, 106f. / KW XIX, 50, my italics)

This determination of the masculine and the feminine, Anti-Climacus adds, holds true only in the relation between man and woman. In the God-relationship 'it applies for man as well as for woman that abandonment is the self, and that the self can be gained only through abandonment'.<sup>145</sup>

The fact that the moment of vision, *Øieblikket*, is depicted as the glance of a woman, then, conceals a significant indication. Haufnien-sis does not simply point to the sexual difference between male and female as the ground of otherness (and thus of temporality), but to femininity as a mode of existing which is essentially 'for other'. According to Lévinas' formulation, femininity, being for other, does not denote 'a quality different from all others, but the quality of difference'.<sup>146</sup> By thus depicting the moment of vision as the glance of a woman, Haufnien-sis grounds the temporality of existence in a being-for-other, where the otherness of the other transcends the difference between the sexes and points to the eternal.

(2) The second point to note is the opposition between voice and glance in the passage.

An outburst of her emotion, a sigh or a word has already, as a sound, more of the determination of time and is more present in the direction of disappearing, and there is not so much of the presence of the eternal in it. For this very reason, a sigh, a word etc. have power to relieve the soul of its burden, precisely because that which burdens it begins to be something of the past the moment it has been pronounced. A glance is

<sup>144</sup> SKS 2, 419 / KW III, 432.

<sup>145</sup> SV3 15, 107 / KW XIX, 50.

<sup>146</sup> *Time and the Other*, tr. by Richard A. Cohen, Pennsylvania, USA 1995 [1947], p. 36.

therefore a designation of time, but note well, time in the fateful conflict when it is touched by eternity. (*loc. cit.*)

Haufniensis' analysis of Ingeborg's glance brings out the opposition between the glance and the voice. The eternal, he argues, is more present in the glance than in the the voice. What is the difference between the voice and the glance? The former is expressive, the latter receptive. The voice not merely re-presents what is 'inside'; it excludes from the inside. What is ex-pressed with the voice is 'pressed out' or externalized. The voice is thus a more comprehensive category than the word. A sigh of Ingeborg and the sobbing of a child, though non-verbal, are phenomena of the voice. (The sigh is, as it were, the midway house between the glance and the word. It brings relief without making sense.) If the relief of the voice transcends the sense-making of language, it still shares with language the basic characteristic of being a form of expression; and, as expression, Haufniensis states, the voice brings relief by making the burden something of the past. His point seems to be that for Ingeborg to express her loss would involve an identification of the pain of the loss with the expression. The voice has the primordial characteristic of outlet rather than representation. When the sound of the voice would die out, Ingeborg would feel that she had been relieved from her burden.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> As a third point, the relationship between concept and metaphor implied by this passage could be noted. Ingeborg's glance is not employed as an illustration of a concept, but it 'is a metaphor of that of which the moment of vision is also a metaphor'. The 'that' which the moment of vision designates is only spoken of metaphorically. This ambiguity also permeates Haufniensis' discussion of the parts of time. Apparently, he deals with a traditional philosophical problem, but it soon becomes clear that he employs the categories of time in an ambiguous way. Instead of using the grammatical vocabulary [*Fortid*, *Nutid* and *Fremtid*], he employs a standard metaphorical terminology in which the past [*det Forbigangne*] literally means 'that which passed by', the present [*det Nærværende*] 'that which is close/near', and the future [*det Tilkommende*] 'that which comes to one'. In this literal sense all three categories denote a relationship to an external reality, rather than simply an inner time experience. This interdependence of metaphor and concept is, it seems, a feature of Kierkegaard's writing as a whole. The concept is thrown on the metaphor. Concepts are therefore sometimes hypostatized and personified precisely at the decisive moment of their coinage. We have seen this in the discourses, and now in *The Concept of Anxiety*.

Elias of Wilna, a sixteenth century Rabbi who was renowned for his ability to find striking illustrations for any point in question, was once asked where he got all his images from. His answer amply justifies his fame: A nobleman of his acquaintance, he told, once saw a boy shooting arrows against a wall. At first he was impressed to see that each of his arrows had hit right in the centre of the target. But then he noticed that the boy would shoot the arrow first, and then go and paint cir-

The glance must therefore be devoid of the voice. Only thus does its meaning come to light as pre-linguistic, non-intentional openness, an openness that does not result from the powers of transcendence of the self, but from a deformation of the self, from the trace of the other – the openness of a wound.<sup>148</sup>

An episode from Peter Høeg's novel *Borderliners* can serve as an illustration of Haufniensis' conception of time, the other, and language (the voice). One of the central aims of this novel is to pinpoint the moment 'when time entered your world'.<sup>149</sup> The main narrative of three children's upbringing in a children's home, is framed by a series of descriptions of the narrator's relationship to his little daughter.

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cles around it, thus pretending that he had hid the target. Similarly, the rabbi would start with the image and make the points arise from it (P. Borchsenius *Bag Muren*, Copenhagen 1957, p. 233). Does not the metaphor in Kierkegaard precede the concept just as in the rabbi's anecdote the impact of the arrow preceded the target? And, to change the imagery, the concepts – are they 'truths' that are only dimly mirrored on the water's surface of the metaphor? Are they not rather rings in the water issuing from the point where the metaphor broke the surface?

<sup>148</sup> The metaphor of the wound has some potential, it seems to me, when it comes to understanding the essence of 'openness'. If genuine openness towards the other cannot come about through the activity of the self (and this is what I take Kierkegaard to be saying), this must be something which the self suffers. The opening must have the form of a crack or a wound. The following remarks are only indications in this respect.

(1) Climacus employs the image of the wound to describe the authenticity of 'the subjective thinker'. In contradistinction to the speculative thinker, such a thinker is, Climacus writes, 'cognizant of the negativity of the infinite in existence; he always keeps open the wound of negativity...(the others let the wound close and become positive – deceived)' (SV3 9, 73 / KW XII, 85). Socrates stands as the highest representative of this kind of thinker; his ignorance is not merely absence of knowledge, but a relation to the unknown as unknown (I shall return to this in Chapter Four). The openness towards the unknown characteristic of Socratic ignorance is not, however, an activity of the self, but a suffering, a deformation in the self.

(2) Over against Climacus' *Postscript* stands Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. According to Hegel, the power of Spirit consists in its ability to heal without scars. 'The wounds of the Spirit heal, and leave no scars behind' (*The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 407). Let me here recall the image from Chapter One: if Hegelian phenomenology sees the forms of consciousness as the stages in an organic development (bud, flower, fruit), in which one state of consciousness is so completely taken over by the next that it leaves no trace, Kierkegaard's negative phenomenology was described with the image of a pearl oyster in which the creation of a beautiful pearl results from the ongoing struggle to cover up the disturbance of its inner life.

<sup>149</sup> Peter Høeg *De måske egnede*, Copenhagen 1993, p. 141 / *Borderliners*, tr. by Barbara Haveland, Harvill 1995, p.126.



One of them depicts how the child's sense of time was rooted in an experience of separation. One day the spouse of the narrator goes out, and he is left alone with his daughter. The child is still almost organically attached to the mother, and she has never before been left on her own with her father for a longer period of time. She then totters to the door where her mother left, looking lost and full of sorrow. But unlike earlier times, she does not cry. 'It was as though she was trying out something.' Then it comes: 'Mummy back soon.' This was the first time she had used a designation of time. Time had entered her world. The narrator explains:

On the floor, when I had sat down beside her, I had seen as though with her eyes how the world came to her. Great and forbidding. With the words she tried to lay tunnels of order in this chaos.... In the chaotic sorrow of being separated from the woman, she had introduced order by explaining that it was determined by time, temporal, that it would cease. She employed time in order to overcome the pain of separation. (op. cit., pp. 84f. / 73)

This moment when the designation of time is employed for the first time does, of course, not coincide with Haufniensis' moment of vision, for in his conception the glance is an older designation of time than language. Unlike the glance, language does not express the separation, but rather relieves it. Both, however, apprehend the experience of time as grounded in the experience of the loss of the other, and in both versions the temporality of existence is neither understood as the in-timeness of existence, nor as the ecstasies of the self, but as the trace of the other.

### *The Fall as the Beginning of History*

Let us return the text: 'Only in the moment of vision does history begin'. Ingeborg's history does not start with her gradual development in the relationship to Frithiof (when she belonged 'organically' to him as the fruit to its kernel), but with the moment of separation. That history begins in the moment of vision means that it originates in the fragmentation of an original unity. Temporality is grounded in a fall. It is therefore significant that Haufniensis introduces this notion of temporality in his 'simple psychological deliberation oriented in the direction of the dogmatic problem of original sin'.<sup>150</sup> The

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<sup>150</sup> The subtitle of *The Concept of Anxiety*.

analysis of the moment of vision is, on the one hand, a 'psychological deliberation' on the genesis of time experience; but, on the other hand, this deliberation points 'in the direction of the dogmatic problem of original sin'. Haufniensis' psychological analysis, therefore, does not aim at a philosophical determination of temporality, but at a determination of the doctrine of sin. Or rather, Haufniensis' depiction of the moment of vision is of such a kind that it does not lend itself to an ontological conception of temporality à la Heidegger, but only to a religious act of repentance and expectancy.

A number of twentieth century philosophers have in different ways criticised the traditional conception of time as a kind of medium in which our lives unfold. Thinkers such as Bergson, Husserl, Heidegger, and Lévinas have each attempted to outline a theory of time that starts from a fact that is 'older' than pure, objective time. In Bergson the measurable time of our everyday lives, the time of science, is derived from duration, the creative time of inner life; in Heidegger the phenomenon of time is grounded in Dasein's *Geworfenheit* and being-towards-death; in Lévinas time arises from the encounter with the face of the other. According to Haufniensis time is also grounded in an 'older' fact; this fact is the moment of vision understood as fallenness or the trace of the other.<sup>151</sup> On the following pages Haufniensis' conception of temporality will be juxtaposed to those of Heidegger and Lévinas.

Let us first briefly consider Heidegger's celebrated interpretation of Dasein's being-towards-death. In Part One of *Being and Time*, care is pointed out as Dasein's structure; but it is also pointed out that since care means being-ahead-of-oneself, this structure is incompatible with Dasein's being-a-whole. The task of Part Two is to bring to light the structure of the being of Dasein in its totality and authentic-

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<sup>151</sup> This chapter thus argues against the interpretation of Kierkegaard's 'moment of vision' expressed by Heidegger in *Being and Time*. Kierkegaard, Heidegger writes, 'clings to the ordinary conception of time, and defines "the moment of vision" with the help of the "now" and "eternity"'. When Kierkegaard speaks of "temporality", what he has in mind is man's being-in-time. Time as the within-timeness knows only the "now"; it never knows a moment of vision. If, however, such a moment gets experienced in an existentiell manner, then a more primordial temporality has been presupposed, although existentially it has not been made explicit' (SZ 338n / BT 387n). Heidegger concludes this note by referring to the passages on Kierkegaard in K. Jaspers' *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* (1919). One cannot help thinking that this remark was written more under the influence of Jaspers' *existenz-philosophische* Kierkegaard interpretation than of Kierkegaard's own texts.

ity. This transition takes place when Dasein's being ahead of itself is interpreted in terms of its being-towards-death.

Dasein always relates to death. Even in the untroubled indifference where *das Man* constantly tranquillises any impeding sense of mortality, death is always precisely the issue. When Dasein relates authentically to death, however, the projections of the everyday mode of existing must cease. For death is not simply one possibility among others; it is '*the possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all*'.<sup>152</sup> When Dasein relates to death as its ownmost possibility of being it cannot remain passive, but it 'runs ahead' anticipating its own death. In thus resolutely anticipating death, Dasein becomes 'whole' and thereby 'authentic'.

It is Dasein's being-towards-death which imposes a temporal structure on all its experiences. This temporal structure is ecstatic, i.e., it is Dasein's 'being out of itself' either in its roots (past) or its surroundings (present) or in its death (whether directly in anticipatory resoluteness, or indirectly in the evasions of inauthentic existence). The parts of time (past, present and future) do not constitute a temporal structure prior to and independent of the being of Dasein. Rather, temporality's 'essence is a process of temporalizing in the unity of the ecstases'.<sup>153</sup> The ordinary concept of time, by contrast, arises from inauthentic temporality which projects itself into the world. The everyday absorption in the world implies the necessity of reckoning with time in all its daily affairs.<sup>154</sup>

Heidegger's account of death in *Being and Time*, then, is strictly dialectical. Death gives to Dasein precisely what it takes away. It makes Dasein a whole by making it something non-existent. As the utmost possibility of existence, it is also the impossibility of existence. This dialectic comes back to Heidegger's determination of the two fundamental aspects of death: its alterity and its mineness. Death constitutes at once the very mineness of Dasein's being and the negation of this being.

Lévinas' central criticism of the notion of ecstatic temporality is that by understanding temporality in terms of Dasein's finality, Heidegger does not truly break the immanence of subjectivity. Already in *Existence and Existents* (1947) he writes: 'If time is not the illusion of a movement, pawing the ground, then the absolute alterity of another

<sup>152</sup> SZ, 262 / BT, 307.

<sup>153</sup> SZ, 328 / BT, 377.

<sup>154</sup> SZ, 404f. / BT, 456f.

instant cannot be found in the subject, who is definitively himself. This alterity comes to me only from the other'.<sup>155</sup> In *Time and the Other* (1948) this insight is articulated in direct opposition to Heidegger. Heidegger misinterprets the meaning of death, it is argued, by claiming that it is always *mine*, my utmost possibility etc. Death, according to Lévinas, does not only close the horizon of Dasein's inauthentic possibilities, but it shatters the very being of Dasein. Death is therefore precisely not a possibility for Dasein. It is not the possibility of the impossibility, but *the impossibility of possibility*.<sup>156</sup>

Let us consider this important formulation. To say that death is a possibility means that it belongs to Dasein's horizon of projection. When Heidegger states that death is the possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all, he indicates that death is the *limit*, the full stop, as it were, which makes the sentence complete. Death is therefore meaningful even from a purely immanent perspective. When, on the other hand, Lévinas claims that death is the impossibility of possibility he sees death as *contradiction*. Dasein is not simply running up against *his own* limit in death, but he is being contradicted by something else. Two different conceptions of the alterity of death follow from these respective views. When death is understood as limit (the possibility of the impossibility), its alterity consists in its character of negation. But the alterity of negation is relative, not genuinely other. When, on the other hand, death is construed as contradiction (the impossibility of possibility), there is an alterity which transcends that of negation, a genuine *otherness*, in death. The alterity of death is thus grasped outside negativity, as a positive otherness. According to Lévinas' view, death constitutes a relation with something absolutely other, something we cannot anticipate in our own being, but only suffer as an encroachment of that very being. The passivity which characterizes our relation to death contains the mystery of the other. 'My solitude is not confirmed by death, but broken by it.'<sup>157</sup> If the anticipation of one's death is the ultimate act of freedom for Heidegger, death means the 'reversal of the subject's activity into passivity' for Lévinas.<sup>158</sup> While Heidegger's ecstatic temporality is grounded in the finality of Dasein's being (its being-towards-death), Lévinas sees the

<sup>155</sup> Quoted by Richard A. Cohen in his introduction to *Time and the Other*, p. 6.

<sup>156</sup> *Time and the Other*, p. 70n.

<sup>157</sup> Op. cit., p. 74.

<sup>158</sup> Op. cit., p. 72.

meaning of time precisely as a transcendence, as the relationship to the other through the mystery of death. He writes:

The relationship with the other is the absence of the other; not absence pure and simple, not the absence of pure nothingness, but absence in a horizon of the future, an absence that is time. This is the horizon where a personal life can be constituted in the heart of the transcendent event...the victory over death. (op. cit., p. 90)

Let us now return to *The Concept of Anxiety*. How does Haufniensis' temporality, grounded in the moment of vision, relate to Heidegger's and Lévinas'<sup>159</sup> respective notions of temporality in terms of being-towards-death and being towards the mystery of the other? On the one hand, it is clear that Lévinas' project is profoundly congruent with Haufniensis' interpretation of the moment of vision in terms of Ingeborg's glance. Time, according to both, cannot be explained in terms of the ecstasies of the self, but reflects a relation to an other, a relation which is based on the absence of the other. On the other hand, death is conspicuously absent from Haufniensis' account of temporality. The role of death in both Heidegger (death as finitude) and Lévinas (death as the mystery of the other) is taken over, in Haufniensis' account, by the moment of vision. In Haufniensis, the otherness in which the meaning of temporality is grounded does not result from an ontological relationship to death, but from a moment of separation, a fall. Fallenness, not mortality, is for Haufniensis the ground of temporality.

Aristophanes' comical account of the origin of gender in Plato's *Symposium* is therefore in a certain way closer to Haufniensis' conception of the moment of vision than those of either Heidegger or Lévinas.<sup>160</sup> Originally, Aristophanes argued, there were not only men and women, but also men-women. These creatures revolted against the gods, and Zeus punished them by cutting them in two halves. 'Each of us, then, is but a tally of a man, since every one shows like a flat-fish the traces of having been sliced in two; and each is ever searching for the tally that will fit him'.<sup>161</sup> This myth shares with Ingeborg's glance in Haufniensis' interpretation the conception of the beginning of history in the moment of separation. Yet an essential difference remains: in Aristophanes' tale the other whose absence is constitutive for the temporality of the self is the other half, and not,

<sup>159</sup> That is, the Heidegger of *Being and Time* and the Lévinas of *Time and the Other*. I am not here taking into account the developments of their respective views.

<sup>160</sup> *Symposium*, 189c-193d.

<sup>161</sup> Op. cit., 191d, W. R. M. Lamb's translation in the *Loeb Classical Library*.

as in Ingeborg, the kernel or ground of being of the self. For to be a sinner not only means to be cut off from one's other half, but having cut oneself off from the ground of one's being.

In this chapter we have discussed the notion of time and historicality implied by Haufniensis' claim that 'only in the moment of vision does history begin'. By exploring the notions of time and the other in Chapter Three of *The Concept of Anxiety*, I have attempted to throw light on Constantius' claims concerning his category of repetition. Haufniensis himself points out the close connection between the moment of vision and repetition in a footnote in this chapter.<sup>162</sup> However, before returning to Constantius' category we shall make another detour to the writings of Johannes Climacus. While the present chapter explored Haufniensis' notion of time as the trace of the other, the following chapter will discuss Climacus' notion of reconciliation as the fullness of time. In a draft of Chapter Three of *The Concept of Anxiety*, Haufniensis wrote that 'time only comes into existence with sin (just as, conversely, it only reaches fullness in reconciliation)'.<sup>163</sup> In this chapter we have discussed, the coming into being of time in a moment of separation; in Chapter Four we shall see how time reaches its fullness in reconciliation, and in Chapter Five we shall return to *Repetition* in order to see how these two aspects of time are brought together in Constantius' category.

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<sup>162</sup> SKS 4, 393n / KW VIII, 90n.

<sup>163</sup> Pap. V B 55, 12 / not included in JP.

## Chapter Four

### Reconciliation as the Fullness of Time

It was noted in the Introduction that Constantius introduces the category of repetition as a paradigm for modern thinking as opposed to the Greek paradigm of recollection. In order to capture this distinction between recollection and repetition, we set out three guiding questions for this study based on Constantius' three basic claims concerning repetition. The first claim was that the category of repetition bestows a new meaning on the historicity of existence; this theme was discussed in the first two chapters on the basis of Constantius' own writing and the edifying discourses from that period. I concluded that the notion of historicity implied by the category of repetition is distinct from the historicity of recollection (or understanding) since in the former, the authenticity of the self depends on its openness towards the future while in the latter it consists in its integration of the past. It was further argued that if the historicity of recollection has being-a-whole as the criterion for authenticity, the historicity of repetition has being-for-the-other as such a criterion. The question of historicity thus leads to the second guiding question, that of the other. In Chapter Three I discussed the relationship between historicity and the other, arguing that the temporality of existence is grounded in the fall. In this chapter, I shall argue that just as time is grounded in a moment of separation, so it reaches completion or fullness in the moment of reconciliation. Constantius himself pointed this out when he wrote that his project of discovering the meaning of repetition ends up with the notion of 'reconciliation [or: atonement] which is the deepest expression of repetition'.<sup>164</sup> However, Constantius' remarks are few and enigmatic, and we must therefore once again turn to one of the pseudonyms from the year after *Repetition*, to Johannes Climacus, in order to clarify the meaning of Constantius' words. In Chapters Five and Six we shall then return to Constantius'

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<sup>164</sup> *Pap.* IV B 117, p. 293 / *KW* VI, suppl., 313; cf. *Pap.* IV B 120, p. 309 / *KW* VI, suppl., 324.

book in order to see how his basic claims concerning historicity and the other unite in the question of becoming.

This chapter proceeds in three steps. First, the meaning of Climacus' notion of the other is analysed on the basis of two passages from the writings attributed to him; second, this conception will be illustrated with two examples from Kierkegaard's late production; and in the end Climacus' thought will be compared with two of the great thinkers of otherness: Hegel and Lévinas.

### *Climacus' Notion of the Other*

Climacus' notion of the other arises out of a project that, despite differences in style and tone, is profoundly similar to that of *Repetition*. This project consists in contrasting recollection and the moment of vision, Socrates and Jesus, the forgetfulness of time in metaphysics and the fullness of time in the incarnation. Climacus first set forth his project as a 'thought experiment' in *Philosophical Fragments* (1844), and later brought out the philosophical and theological consequences of this project in his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* (1846). We shall see how the question of otherness is developed in both works.

### *Ignorance and Consciousness of Sin*

If one takes the project of *Philosophical Fragments* at face value, it simply articulates an understanding of human existence by way of contrast to the Socratic teaching of recollection. 'Should it be otherwise...' is the non-committal methodological move which gets the project going in Chapter One. From this point of departure Climacus develops an understanding of human existence in which the rupture of the moment of vision takes the place of continuous recollection (Chapter One), and the ascent of human beings to the eternal is substituted by the descent of the eternal to temporal human beings (Chapter Two). But in Chapter Three it becomes clear that Climacus' project is more complex than the opening chapters suggest. For while the argument of the first two chapters implied a direct opposition between the Socratic and the Christian positions, this chapter sets forth Christianity as the fulfilment of the Socratic position.<sup>165</sup> This compli-

<sup>165</sup> Along the lines of the *Postscript* one could say that this ambiguity of Climacus' project arises from his failure to distinguish the Socratic and the Platonic positions.



cation takes place in Climacus' discussion of the meaning of Socrates' ignorance. We shall therefore consider this passage in order to see how the notions of otherness and difference are introduced as the distinguishing mark of Christianity.

The Socratic view (as it is described in the *Fragments*) involves the claim that a human being has access to the divine in and through himself. 'Self-knowledge is knowledge of God'.<sup>166</sup> The assumption underlying this view is that human beings can achieve a genuine knowledge of themselves. However, Socrates himself, 'the knower of man', admits in *Phaedrus* to a fundamental uncertainty concerning the very nature of his being. Responding to Phaedrus' question as to whether he believes in a certain myth Socrates answers:

I have no leisure for such enquiries; shall I tell you why? I must first know myself, as the Delphian inscription says; to be curious about that which is not my concern, while I am still in ignorance of my own self, would be ridiculous. And therefore I bid farewell to all this, the common opinion is enough for me. For, as I was saying, I want to know, not about this, but about myself: am I a monster more complicated and with more passion than Typho, or a creature of a gentler and simpler sort, possessing, by divine grace, a nature devoid of pride. (*Phaedrus* 229c-230a, in B. Jowett's translation)

Chapter Three of *Philosophical Fragments* is an exposition of the implications of this reply. The understanding of a human being's relation to the truth implied by the thesis that all knowing is recollection must be qualified by this experience of ignorance and uncertainty. It is of little avail to know that the truth lies concealed within oneself, if that self evaporates upon closer inspection. The Socratic position thus breaks down from within in the experience of ignorance. The task is now to formulate an understanding of the relation between human existence and truth in which ignorance is not simply a lack of relationship, but is itself a form of this relation.

In attempting to solve this task, Climacus returns several times to the analogy of erotic love. A person can live with an undisturbed sense of identity, he argues, when, suddenly, 'the paradox of self-love

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Commenting on the project of *Philosophical Fragments*, Climacus writes in the *Postscript*: 'The thesis [that all knowing is recollecting] certainly belongs to both of them, but Socrates continually parts with it because he wants to exist. By holding Socrates to the thesis that all knowing is recollecting, one turns him into a speculative philosopher instead of what he was, an existing thinker who understood existing as essential' (SV3 9, 172n / KW XII,1, 206n). For the purposes of the present analysis of Socratic ignorance, I shall, however, stick to the distinction in *Philosophical Fragments*.

<sup>166</sup> SKS 4, 220 / KW VII, 11.

wakes up as love for an other, for somebody missing'. By this paradox the loving person changes so that he 'no longer recognizes himself'.<sup>167</sup> In the case of love, then, it appears that ignorance of oneself does not preclude the relation to the other, rather, it is the initial form of this relation. For the other is not somebody out there, but 'somebody missing', that is, somebody whose absence frustrates the sense of being complete. It is not a dawning awareness of the presence of the other that kindles the fire of love, but the sense of the absence of the other, the discovery of the trace of the other. The paradox of self-love, then, is that it can only realise itself by seeking its own downfall in the relation to the missing one. A self-love that does not seek its own downfall in this way is 'without passion'.<sup>168</sup>

But how does the paradox of erotic love mirror the paradox of Socrates' disturbed self-knowledge? Climacus' claim is that passionate reason shares with passionate self-love the structure of seeking its own downfall. Just as self-love, when it singles out a person whose presence, as it were, makes up for the one missing, ceases to be self-love and becomes love of this other, so reason seeks something missing, a final explanation, the coming of which is at once the fulfilment and the downfall of reason.

The figure of Socrates embodies this paradox. His ignorance is, as it were, the point preceding the transition from self-love to love of the other, from explanation of transfiguration. For what does it mean to be aware of one's own ignorance? When we say of another person that he is ignorant with respect to a certain issue, we claim that this issue lies beyond the limits of his knowledge. But when a person says of himself that he is essentially ignorant, he expresses a kind of self-transcendence. For ignorance (in the first person) is not simply lacking knowledge, but knowledge of lacking knowledge. To claim essential ignorance is thus to express a relation to the absolute other, to the unknown as unknown. Anti-Climacus captures this point in *The Sickness unto Death*: 'Let us never forget that Socrates' ignorance was a kind of fear of God and worship, that his ignorance was a Greek version of the Jewish dictum "the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom"'.<sup>169</sup>

The insight that ignorance is a relation to the absolute Other is reserved for those who are no longer ignorant. Ignorance itself does

<sup>167</sup> SKS 4, 244 / KW VII, 39; cf. SKS 4, 252f. / KW VII, 47-49.

<sup>168</sup> SKS 4, 242f. / KW VII, 37.

<sup>169</sup> SV3 15, 151 / KW XIX, 229.

not admit a positive determination of the other as 'the unknown' or 'that which resists the synthesizing powers of reason'. For, as Climacus puts it, reason 'cannot absolutely negate but uses itself for that purpose and consequently thinks the difference in itself which it thinks by itself. It cannot absolutely transcend itself, and it only apprehends something above itself when it is apprehended by itself'.<sup>170</sup> The negativity of ignorance is therefore incapable of sublation. The analysis of ignorance therefore ends in the question whether a positive relation to the absolute Other is thinkable at all.<sup>171</sup>

Near the end of the chapter Climacus answers this question. His argument can, I think, be summed up in two points. (1) 'The god' cannot be the origin of the difference between himself and human beings. For if the difference could be traced back to God, we would be in accordance with his being, precisely by being different from him, and the difference would then dissolve. Difference must therefore originate in humankind; it must result from a fall, rather than from creation, from the self-imprisonment of the self rather than from the plurality of the world. (2) This difference can only be bridged from God's side. For, as Climacus writes in Chapter One, 'no captivity is so impossible to break out of as that in which the individual holds himself captive!'<sup>172</sup> And further: since the powers belonging to human consciousness are turned against the other, the relation

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<sup>170</sup> SKS 4, 249f. / KW VII, 45.

<sup>171</sup> Niels Thulstrup's and C. Stephen Evans' commentaries on Chapter Three of *Philosophical Fragments* mark two distinct interpretations of Socratic ignorance. In Thulstrup's reading, ignorance is a purely negative phenomenon that demonstrates the untenability of the idealistic position (*Philosophiske Smuler* udgivet med indledning og kommentar af Niels Thulstrup, Copenhagen 1977, pp. 162f.). According to C. Stephen Evans' interpretation, Socratic ignorance is not only a negative phenomenon but also a 'point of contact'. He sums up his analysis as follows: 'Chapter 3 has explored the closest analogues within the field of human reason to the realization of sin, namely the failure of human beings to gain any knowledge of God and the resultant bewilderment as the paradox of our nature is confronted, not knowing whether we are monsters more curious than Typhon or something divine. This encounter with the different, with what is "other," turns out to be, however, only an encounter with what is relatively different and other' (*Passionate Reason*, Bloomington & Indianapolis 1992, pp. 60 & 76). Evans' interpretation is, of course, closer to the one I argue, than that of Thulstrup; but the central contention of my interpretation, that Socratic ignorance is not merely lack of knowledge, but knowledge of lacking knowledge, that it is a relation to the unknown as unknown, this positive determination of ignorance as a relation to the absolute other, is equally incompatible with both these interpretations.

<sup>172</sup> SKS 4, 226 / KW VII, 17.

cannot be established in such a way that God simply makes himself known. In this case, he would submit himself to the assimilating powers of human understanding, and thereby give up otherness. Rather, the relation to the absolute other is established in the consciousness of being alienated from the ground of one's being, that is, in the consciousness of sin. The consciousness of sin is therefore the positive relation to the absolute other which Socratic ignorance was striving towards. Climacus concludes:

The connoisseur of human nature became almost bewildered about himself when he came up against the different; he did not know any more whether he was a monster more strange than Typhon or whether there was something divine in him. What did he lack, then? The consciousness of sin.... (SKS 4, 251f. / KW VII, 47)

From one perspective, Climacus' claims concerning the relationship between God and humankind are fairly standard Christian theology, but he employs the doctrines in a highly innovative way. Instead of seeing the doctrine of the incarnation as a metaphysical theory of the relationship between the eternal and the temporal, the divine and the human, he turns incarnation against traditional metaphysics. The doctrine of the incarnation thus becomes a paradigm of post-metaphysical thinking. But in what sense can the incarnation be said to be anti-metaphysical? Does it not rather affirm the dualisms which are the defining marks of metaphysics? While the counter-metaphysical tradition from Hegel has criticised the dualism of metaphysics, the objection implied by the incarnation is that metaphysics cannot think this dualism radically enough. The incarnation implies a transcendence beyond metaphysics, that is, a difference that does not allow itself to be thematized by consciousness, but which can qualify consciousness as the consciousness of sin.

The relationship between dream-reality and actuality can perhaps serve as an illustration of the notion of otherness and difference implied by Climacus' interpretation of the incarnation. Since there is no part of actuality that cannot also be part of a dream, there is no criterion by which it can be decided whether I am at this moment dreaming or awake. There is no exit in a dream world. If there is a state of being that qualifies my present state as dream-consciousness, this state of being cannot be grasped from my dreaming position. Wittgenstein's concluding note on the dream in *On Certainty* (the last words he wrote, two days before his death on April 29th 1951) expresses the reduction to immanence implied by the distinction between dream-reality and actuality.

I cannot seriously suppose that I am at this moment dreaming. Someone who, dreaming, says 'I am dreaming', even if he speaks audibly in doing so, is no more right than if he said in his dream 'it is raining', while it was in fact raining. Even if his dream was actually connected with the noise of the rain.<sup>173</sup>

It is, of course, not a matter of denying that a dreaming person can distinguish between dream-reality and actuality. The point is precisely that all the dualities that are available in a dream world (including that of dream and reality) do not bring the sleeping person closer to the duality of which his entire consciousness makes up the one pole. Wittgenstein's remark is almost self-refuting: 'I must assume that I cannot assume that I now dream'. When Climacus writes that 'reason cannot absolutely negate itself', he expresses a similar understanding of transcendence. The true distinction between self and other cannot be constituted from within, through thought's reaching out, but only from the outside, through the breaking in on existence by the other. *The gap between self and other can be bridged only from the other's side.* Thus when transcendence is thought in terms of the distinction between dream-reality and actuality, the other world exists neither as origin to which everything can be traced back, nor as the limit that restricts and defines the temporal world, but only as confrontation, contradiction, break-in. In the terminology of the discourses: if there is a relation to the other, this relation does not have the form of explanation [*Forklaring*], but of transfiguration [*Forklarelse*].

We must now turn to the *Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* where Climacus elaborates the distinction between the Socratic and the Christian position.

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<sup>173</sup> *On Certainty* §676. Cf. the following remark from *Philosophical Investigations*: 'If there were a verb meaning "to believe falsely", it could not have any significant first person present indicative' (Part Two, X, § 190); and a note from 4 September 1937: 'Christianity is not a doctrine, not, I mean, a theory about what has happened and will happen to the human soul, but a description of something that actually takes place in human life. For "consciousness of sin" is a real event and so are despair and salvation through faith. Those who speak of such things (Bunyan for instance) are simply describing what has happened to them, whatever gloss anyone may want to put on it' (Ray Monk *The Duty of Genius*, London 1990, p. 376). The profound analogy between Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein which remarks such as these suggest, and of which Wittgenstein himself was keenly aware, consists, I suggest, in a kind of reduction to immanence that results, not from an exclusion of the thought of the another world, but, on the contrary, from a sense of the absolute transcendence of such a world. However this may be, the relationship between Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein certainly deserves careful consideration. (Cf. Rush Rhees (ed.) *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, Oxford 1984, p. 87).

*Contradiction and Contemporaneity*

In the section of the *Postscript* entitled 'Possibility Superior to Actuality; Actuality Superior to Possibility',<sup>174</sup> Climacus distinguishes three attitudes to what he calls 'an actuality outside me': the poetic or philosophical, the ethical, and the Christian attitudes. On the basis of this distinction, I shall further explore the notion of the other implied by the Christian teaching of the incarnation.

(1) *Poetry and abstract philosophy*. The meaning of poetry does not consist in establishing a relation between the reader and the external world, Climacus argues, but in opening a horizon of possibilities within the reader. From this perspective, Aristotle is therefore right in claiming that poetry is higher than history since history only deals with what has happened while poetry depicts what could and ought to have happened.<sup>175</sup> Similarly, abstract philosophy does not establish a relation to actuality, but abstracts from it by translating actuality into thought-actuality.<sup>176</sup> Climacus writes:

With regard to every reality outside myself, it holds true that I can grasp it only in thinking. If I were actually to grasp it, I would have to make myself into the other person, the one acting, to make the actuality alien to me into my own personal actuality, which is an impossibility. That is, if I make the actuality alien to me into my own actuality, it does not mean that by knowing about it I become he, but it means a new actuality that belongs to me as different from him. (SV3 10, 26 / KW XII,1, 321)

The point is not simply that poetry and philosophy never reach the other's actuality; rather, the very labour of imaginative and abstract thinking consists in dissolving other-being in my possibility; the transition goes '*ab esse ad posse*'. The labour of understanding, we might say, is to avoid contemporaneity with the other; to see the world with the eyes of Medusa.

(2) *The Socratic position, ethics*. If poetry and philosophy translates '*ab esse ad posse*', ethics makes the opposite transition '*ab posse ad esse*'.<sup>177</sup> The *esse* with which ethics is concerned, however, is not the exterior actuality of an other being, but the actuality of the thinking individual himself. Like art and philosophy, ethics is concerned with a being outside me only in so far as it constitutes a possibility for me. But whereas art and philosophy only make the transition from actu-

<sup>174</sup> SV3 10, 24-45 / KW XII,1, 318-343.

<sup>175</sup> SV3 10, 24 / KW XII,1, 318.

<sup>176</sup> SV3 10, 31-33 / KW XII,1, 327f.

<sup>177</sup> SV3 10, 27 / KW XII,1, 321.

ality to possibility, the ethical person seeks the actualization of this possibility in himself. Ethical action thus involves a double transition: from other-being to my possibility, and from my possibility to my being. Climacus consequently defines ethical action as 'an interiority in which the individual annuls possibility and identifies himself with what is thought in order to exist in it'.<sup>178</sup>

The ethical position ends in Socratic ignorance. For the transition '*ab esse ad posse*' cannot take place in the relation of the self, since the possibility of my own being is inseparable from that very being. The result is that the relation of understanding is replaced by a paradoxical relation, contemporaneity with oneself. Climacus writes with reference to Socrates:

When the thinking person with the dissolving *posse* (a thought actuality is a possibility) comes up against an *esse* he cannot dissolve, he must say: This I am unable to think. Therefore he suspends thinking. If he is going to or, rather, if he nevertheless wants to relate himself to this actuality as actuality, he does not relate himself to it in thought but paradoxically. (SV3 10, 27 / KW XI,1, 321f.)

(3) *Christianity*. If poetry and philosophy make the transition from actuality to possibility, and if the task of ethics is to translate possibility back to the actuality of the individual, then the incarnation implies the failure of both these projects. For God Incarnate is an actuality outside the individual, not a possibility within him. The exteriority of the eternal means that the relation to the eternal must be grounded in a positive relation to the other rather than in the relation of the self. The incarnation is the 'fact' that this relation, which cannot be constituted through the agency of the self, has been established through the activity of the other. Christianity, unlike poetry, philosophy and ethics, thus involves a relation of contemporaneity to the absolute other, God incarnate.

Climacus brings this out in a number of passages, most clearly perhaps in the sections dealing with the difference between the Socratic position (Religiousness A) and Christianity (Religiousness B). In Religiousness A the individual knows that he owes [*skylder*] his existence to God. The relationship to God, therefore, lies implicit in the relation of the self, and the task is 'the self-annihilation which finds the relationship to God in itself, which in suffering sinks in the relationship to God and grounds itself in it because God is in the ground'. In Religiousness B, by contrast, the individual is separated

<sup>178</sup> SV3 10, 43 / KW XII,1, 339.

from his origin through sin. The relation to God has become a relation to 'something outside the individual'.<sup>179</sup> The transition from A to B is described in two important passages.

the break...cannot take place in the relation between an existing person and the eternal, because the eternal embraces the existing person everywhere, and therefore the misrelation remains within immanence. If a break is to establish itself, the eternal itself must define itself as something temporal, in time, historical, whereby eternity comes in between the existing person and the eternal in time. This is the paradox. (SV3 10, 205 / KW XII,1, 532)

And later he writes:

[I]n the consciousness of guilt [*Skylð*] the subject's self-identity is preserved, and the consciousness of guilt is a change of the subject within the subject himself. The consciousness of sin, however is a change of the subject himself, which shows that outside the individual there must be the power that makes clear to him that he has become a person other than he was by coming into existence, that he has become a sinner. This power is the God in time. (SV3 10, 250 / KW XII,1, 584)

In this way the understanding of sin implied by the 'fact' of the incarnation is constitutive for genuine otherness, so that the consciousness of sin is neither merely a sense of one's own deficiency or inadequacy, nor of a basic indebtedness, but of being 'before God' as the absolute other.

Let me recap: the teaching of the incarnation is distinct from any outlook based on philosophy, art or ethics because it introduces a relation to the other that is not at the same time a negation of the otherness of the other.

We can perhaps distinguish three stages in Climacus' account of the relation to the other: (1) The sense of alienation and ignorance is the form in which the absolute other, as it were, announces his coming; (2) the consciousness of sin is the presence of the other as other; and (3) contemporaneity with Christ is reconciliation of self and other. (Perhaps (2) and (3) belong together). If the labour of art and philosophy is to avoid contemporaneity by changing the other into an image or a concept (*ab esse ad posse*), and if the endeavour of ethics is to become contemporary with oneself (*ab posse ad esse*), then the point about Christianity is to become contemporary with the absolute other, God incarnate.

The objection against traditional metaphysics implicit in the doctrine of the incarnation is that it fails to see that a relationship to the other can be established only through the activity of the other. True,

<sup>179</sup> SV3 10, 229 / KW XII,1, 560f.



the sense of ignorance blocks the back door of recollection and refers the individual to the front door of the other, but the handle of this door is placed on the outside.<sup>180</sup>

Two examples from the later part of Kierkegaard's authorship illustrate how consciousness of sin and the relationship to the other combine.

*First Example: The Image of the Crucified One*<sup>181</sup>

Imagine, Anti-Climacus suggests in *Practice in Christianity* (1850), that you are sitting with a child, turning over the leaves of a book with pictures of famous people.<sup>182</sup> As you go along you explain the pictures to the child. 'This man...riding a snorting steed at the head of thousands upon thousands whom you do not see, his hand stretched out in command, "Forward," forward over the top of the mountain you see before you, forward to victory – this is the emperor, the only one, Napoleon'. Then you tell the child a little about Napoleon, turn the page and show him a picture of Wilhelm Tell, and so forth. Among all these heroic images you have inserted a picture of the crucified one. The child sees it, but is unable to make sense of it. 'Why does this man hang on a tree?' You explain that the cross was an instrument of torture, and that the most flagrant criminals were killed this way. The child looks at you, unable to understand why you have placed a picture of an ugly criminal among all these heroes. You then tell him that this man was the most loving person who ever lived, that he came to the world from above because he loved all people and wanted to help them. And you depict his life in the world: how he was misunderstood and betrayed even by his closest friends; how, in the end, a multitude of people shouted 'crucify, crucify!' against the loving one, while they set free Barabbas, a frightening criminal.

This story will make a deep impression on a child when he hears it for the first time. And if this impression is not wasted away in relig-

<sup>180</sup> As when Kierkegaard writes in an early journal entry: 'If Christ is to come and live in me, it will have to be according to today's gospel reading in the almanac: Christ enters through closed doors' (*Pap.* II A 730 / *JP* 5313).

<sup>181</sup> The passage from *Practice in Christianity* on the image of the crucified has been interpreted by George Pattison in *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious*, pp. 179-86.

<sup>182</sup> *SV*3 16, 168-171 / *KW* XX, 174-178.

ious chatter, it will have a long standing effect on his development. First, a sense of compassion and loyalty develops in the child. Forgetting the centuries separating him from the crucified one, he wants to fight his murderers when he grows up. When he becomes an adolescent, the desire to fight those people who killed Him changes into a longing to revolt against 'the world in which love is being crucified', and 'where people spit upon the Holy One'. In the end, however, he understands that if he wants to be like the abased one, he must learn to suffer patiently in the world, rather than shaking his fist against it. Due to the early impression of this image, the course of his life thus describes stages of alienation. At the first stage the child separates himself from 'evil people', then he is alienated from the world as such, and at the last stage he undergoes an alienation in his understanding of himself, realising that only by suffering can he express the image of the crucified one.

What is it about the image of the crucified one which, according to Anti-Climacus, singles it out from other great images from world history? Where does this alienating power come from? While the other images appealed to the child's imagination, this one made him experience *angst*, as if it did not allow for spectatorship, as if looking at the crucified one meant being looked at by him. Unlike the other great tragic and heroic figures with whom the child could sympathize, the crucified one became for him a 'sign of contradiction', that is, a sign that not only embodies a contradiction (as a tragic hero can be said to embody the contradiction of love and fate), but which *is* a contradiction in the sense that it contradicts the one who sees it.

In an earlier discourse in *Practice in Christianity* Anti-Climacus explored the meaning of Simeon's prophecy that Christ, as the sign of contradiction, would 'disclose the thoughts of the hearts' (Luke 2: 34-35).<sup>183</sup> A sign, Anti-Climacus writes, is 'second being as distinct from first being'; it is something which, in addition to its immediate sense, has another meaning. But in a sign of contradiction, the second meaning does not follow from the first, nor do the two meanings correspond analogically, but they contradict each other, and any immediate understanding of the sign is frustrated by this contradiction. In the case of an ordinary sign, the immediate meaning can and must be recognized, in order to appreciate its transferred meaning. In the case of the sign of contradiction no immediate recognition is possible.

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<sup>183</sup> SV3 16, 122-125 / KW XX, 124-127.

Rather the sign draws attention to itself by signalling a discrepancy even on the level of immediate apprehension. When Christ is called a sign of contradiction this is because his person and his life somehow confronted those who encountered him with a contradiction. The fact that he performed miracles and claimed to be God's son, for example, precluded any immediate recognition. The opposition between what Christ immediately seemed to be (a human being), and what he also seemed to be (divine) made impossible the relation of representation. The contradiction is therefore not merely within the sign, but in the relation between the sign and the spectator. In the terminology of the *Postscript*: being unable to translate the actuality of the other being into my own possibility, a new, paradoxical relation is constituted, the relation of contemporaneity. In this relation the meaning of the sign is not disclosed to the spectator, but the meaning of the spectator is disclosed by his encounter with the sign of contradiction. Anti-Climacus describes the change that comes about when a person encounters the sign of contradiction as follows:

There is something that makes it impossible not to look – and behold, as one is looking one sees as in a mirror, one comes to see oneself, or he who is the sign of contradiction looks straight into one's heart while one is staring into the contradiction... The contradiction confronts him with a choice, and as he is choosing, he himself is disclosed in that which he chooses. (SV3 16, 124 / KW XX, 126f.)

In the section 'Christianity as the Absolute; Contemporaneity with Christ', Anti-Climacus nicely sums up the argument.

In relation to the absolute, there is only one time, the present; for the person who is not contemporary with the absolute, it does not exist at all. And since Christ is the absolute it is easy to see that in relation to him there is only one situation, the situation of contemporaneity.... Thus every human being is able to become contemporary only with the time in which he is living – and with one more, with Christ's life upon earth, for Christ's life upon earth, the holy history, stands on its own, outside history. (SV3 16, 70f. / KW XX, 63f.)

We can now return to the question: How does the image of the crucified saviour differ from other images? The answer lies in the fact that the 'what' of this image determines the 'how' of spectatorship. Since the crucified one is the absolute, this image resists the translation from other-being to my possibility characteristic of aesthetic spectatorship. The claim that this man, the crucified one, is God's son, the saviour of the world, comes in, as it were, between the image and the spectator, thus obstructing the process of assimilation. Genuinely to behold the crucified one as the son of God demands the paradoxical relation of contemporaneity. Anti-Climacus' depiction of the child's

first encounter the image of the crucified one thus illustrates the meaning of his notion of contemporaneity as the relation to the absolute other. The relation of contemporaneity is the opposite of the relation of recollection; for whereas in recollection the absolute lies behind the other being as a unifying whole, in contemporaneity the absolute is the other being. In recollection I form an image or a concept of the other, in contemporaneity I see myself as an image before the other.

*Second Example: The Woman Who Anointed Jesus*

The second example appears in one of the three 'Discourses for the Communion on Fridays' (1849) of which Kierkegaard said that they were 'the place of rest of the authorship'.<sup>184</sup> The communion discourses are of particular interest for this project because a number of scattered remarks suggest that the notion of repetition, after having disappeared from the surface of Kierkegaard's writings for five years, now reappears in the context of the communion. The Eucharist is seen here as a repetition in the sense that it does not add anything to Christ's complete work of reconciliation, but makes new what was completed Good Friday. The meaning of the Eucharist is thus expressed in the Pauline dictum that also expressed the meaning of repetition: 'Behold the old has become new' (2 Cor 5: 17).<sup>185</sup> In one of the communion discourses, for example, he writes of Christ: 'He died once for the sins of the whole world and for our sins; his death is not repeated, but *this* is repeated: He died also for you'.<sup>186</sup>

The text for the discourse on the woman who anointed Jesus is Luke 7: 37ff. Jesus is dining with a group of Pharisees when a sinful woman enters. Weeping she sits down behind him, wets his feet with her tears and dries them with her hair; then she kisses his feet and anoints them. The Pharisees are offended that Jesus accepts these signs of love from a woman who lives in sin. But Jesus praises her

<sup>184</sup> *Pap.* X 2 A 148 / *JP* 6519.

<sup>185</sup> Cf. *SV3* 17, 44 / *KW* XVIII, 184.

<sup>186</sup> *SV3* 17, 46 / *KW* XVIII, 186f. The connection between the early writings on repetition and the communion discourses has been pointed out to me by Ettore Rocca and Niels Jørgen Cappelørn. The latter has explored the context of these discourses in his study 'Die ursprüngliche Unterbrechung. Søren Kierkegaard beim Abendmahl im Freitagsgottesdienst der Kopenhagener Frauenkirche' in *Kierkegaard Studies. Yearbook 1996*, Berlin / New York 1996, pp. 315-388.

love and declares that her sins are forgiven. Kierkegaard devoted three discourses to this figure in the last years of his authorship. In a unique way she came to be seen as embodying the unity of love and the forgiveness of sin. The discourse is very rich and difficult, and it brings together several threads from Kierkegaard's earlier writings.

The connection between love, sin and forgiveness was, for instance, also explored in two early discourses entitled 'Love Hides a Multitude of Sins' (1843).<sup>187</sup> Love is here described as the 'power from above that translates evil to good'; for 'when love lives in the heart, the eye has the power to love forth the good in the impure, indeed, this eye does not see the impure but the pure, which it loves and loves forth by loving it'.<sup>188</sup> Love hides in a double sense: subjectively, it hides the sins of the beloved for the loving person; objectively, love changes the beloved by loving forth love in him, and thus it reconciles those who are separated because of sin. Kierkegaard explains this with the image of a horseman; behind him on the horse sits care or sorrow [*Sorgen*], so that he will not get rid of his care however fast he rides. Now, if this horseman was able to fix his eyes on what is in front, not looking back on that which passed by, care would lose its power over him. But this is precisely what love does to a person: it hides the sins and the failures of the past. 'How would the eye [*Øie*] that loves find time for a backwards look, since the moment [*Øieblik*] it did so it would have to let its object go'.<sup>189</sup> Love is thus a 'blessed deception' that reconciles what understanding has torn apart.<sup>190</sup>

Another important part of the background for this discourse is the conception of love developed in the discourse 'Love Builds Up' in *Works of Love* (1847). Two main points are made in this discourse. First, love is determined, not as a quality of the self, but as 'the quality by which you are for others': 'Love is to presuppose love; to have love is to presuppose love in others; to be loving is to presuppose that others are loving.'<sup>191</sup> It follows from this conception that the distinction between activity and receptivity breaks down in love. For love in this sense is not an activity directed towards the other, it rather consists in exposing oneself to the other. From this, the second point follows: to presuppose love means to build up love in the other.

<sup>187</sup> SKS 5, 65-77 & 78-86 / KW V, 55-68 & 69-78.

<sup>188</sup> SKS 5, 71 / KW V, 61.

<sup>189</sup> SKS 5, 83 / KW V, 74.

<sup>190</sup> SKS 5, 84 / KW V, 76.

<sup>191</sup> SV3 12, 216 / KW XVI, 223.

Though the love of a person is not an activity directed towards the beloved, yet it has a transforming power in the life of the other; love loves forth love. There is a creative power in the work of presupposing through which the beloved gradually changes into the image which the loving person sees of him. This is not God's power to create out of nothing, but a power to uncover love as 'the source of everything and, in a metaphorical sense...the deepest ground of spiritual life'.<sup>192</sup>

Let us now turn to the discourse on the woman who anointed Jesus. If the theme of love's reconciling power is explored mainly on the basis of human relationships in the early discourses considered above, it becomes explicitly Christological in this late discourse. The *Discourses for Communion on Fridays* bring out what is only indicated in the earlier ones: that the love that binds human individuals together is grounded in the love with which God as the absolute other has been reconciled with the individual. The meditation on the love of Christ in the opening prayer captures this point. That Christ is love, Kierkegaard here writes, does not merely mean that He is the object or the recipient of all genuine love; neither does it simply mean that He is the subject of all love. Rather, that Christ is love indicates a kind of coincidence of the concept of love and the reconciling work of Christ. 'You are love in such a way that you love forth the love that loves you'.<sup>193</sup>

Let us see more closely how this is brought out in the discourse. Kierkegaard distinguishes three aspects of the love of this woman. First, the fact that she approaches Jesus at all, that a sinner seeks the holy one, is an expression of the self-surrender of love. Had anything in life at this moment been important to her apart from the forgiveness of her sin, this would have provided an excuse for 'that most dreadful annihilation, to approach the other'.<sup>194</sup> It was her love for Jesus that had both made her hate herself for her sins and given her the courage to expose her need for healing in front of the Pharisees. For 'a perfectly honest, deep, completely true, completely unsparing confession of sins is the perfect love'.<sup>195</sup> Secondly, her love is expressed in the fact that she did not try to explain herself, but remained *silent*. She knew that her words could achieve nothing and

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<sup>192</sup> SV3 12, 209 / KW XVI, 215.

<sup>193</sup> SV3 14, 193 / KW XVIII, 137.

<sup>194</sup> SV3 14, 193 / KW XVIII, 137.

<sup>195</sup> SV3 14, 199 / KW XVIII, 143.

that he could do everything; therefore she abstained from all attempts to make herself understood. The power with which she silently exposed herself to the judgement of the surroundings was a measure of her love.<sup>196</sup> Thirdly, she *forgets* herself while she is crying. And thus, 'like a sick child crying at the mother's breast', she gets rest, forgetting herself so completely that she does not even know what she is crying for. And 'to forget oneself completely is the true expression of love'.<sup>197</sup>

The confession of sin, silence and forgetting are the principal characteristics of the love of this woman. At first Christ's love made her sense her own sin, then her love made her silent before him, and finally, his love made her forget.

Forgetting is a difficult concept: is it an act or an event? Does it have a subject? 'The Rotation of Crops' advocated, as we have seen, forgetting as the art of living artistically (cf. Ch.1). By cutting oneself off from the burden of the past, forgetting makes a person see the world as on the day of creation. But the problem about this kind of forgetting is that it is an action; it attempts to abolish the burden of subjectivity by an act of the subject. And, as long as forgetting has a subject, it belongs to the realm of repression. The author of the *Rotation of Crops* is therefore continually escaping the return of the repressed in the experience of boredom. If the meaning of forgetting is to transcend the category of repression it must be an event, just as much as it is an action. This is indeed the case with this woman. Her forgetting does not result from an attempt to suppress her past, but from her self-abandonment to Christ. A change takes place in this kind of forgetting in which, to use the distinctions from an earlier chapter, the truth of the self no longer depends on its being-a-whole, but on its being-before-the-other, and in which the historicity of understanding or recollection is substituted by the historicity of repetition. Kierkegaard expresses this reversal with the distinction between signifying and being a designation. He writes:

She does not say anything, therefore she is not what she is saying; but she is what she does not say, or: what she does not say is she, she *is* the designation [*Betegnelsen*], as an image: She has forgotten the voice and language and the unrest of thought...forgotten herself; she, the lost one, is lost in her saviour.... (SV3 14, 197 / KW XVIII, 141)

And a further on:

<sup>196</sup> SV3 14, 195f. / KW XVIII, 139.

<sup>197</sup> SV3 14, 196f. / KW XVIII, 139-141.

'She loved much', therefore she forgot herself, she completely forgot herself, 'therefore her many sins were forgiven her' – forgotten, they were drowned, as it were, in her forgetting, and she was transfigured to an image.... (SV3 14, 198 / KW XVIII, 142)

This is how this woman is an eternal image; by her great love she made herself indispensable for the saviour, so to speak. For she who loved much made true what He gained: that there is forgiveness of sins. You can put it as you want. You can praise her because her sins were forgiven her, and you can praise her because she loved much: At bottom you say the same thing if, indeed, you notice that the one she loves much is precisely grace and the giver of grace. (SV4 17, 198f. / KW XVIII, 143)

These are difficult texts to write about, and I shall confine my interpretation to one point: What does it mean that this woman becomes 'a designation' and 'an eternal image'? To *become* an image is the opposite of *making* an image. The artist makes images, the believer becomes an image. The categories of aesthetics thus return in the realm of the Christianity in a reversed form. In the interpretation of the image of the crucified we noticed how the aesthetic paradigm of spectatorship was reversed so that, in Ragni Linnet's expression, 'the spectator is in the image'.<sup>198</sup> By looking on the image of the crucified one, the spectator himself became an image on which the crucified was looking. This is the all important figure of reversal that arises from the Christ event. Earlier in this study (Chapter One), it was traced back to Kierkegaard's doctoral dissertation, *The Concept of Irony* (1841), where he wrote: 'One thing is to poetize oneself, another thing is to be poetized. A Christian is poetized, and in this respect a simple Christian lives far more poetically than many a gifted mind'.<sup>199</sup> This inverted aesthetic of Christian life is also expressed in an important journal entry from 1848. Commenting on his forthcoming discourses on the lilies and the birds, Kierkegaard writes:

Immediacy or spontaneity is poetically the very thing we desire to return to (we want our childhood again etc.), but from a Christian point of view, immediacy is lost and it ought not be *yearned* for again but should be attained again.

In these discourses, therefore, there will be a development of the conflict between poetry and Christianity, how in a certain sense Christianity is prose in comparison with poetry (which is desiring, charming, anaesthetizing and transforms the actuality of life into an oriental dream, just as a young girl might want to lie on a sofa all day and be entranced) – and yet it is the very poetry of the eternal. (*Pap.* VIII,1 A 643 / JP 1942)

It is not difficult to see the implications of this distinction for our study. In the paradigm of recollection, the historicity of under-

<sup>198</sup> This was the title of her paper to the *Kierkegaard Society*, Copenhagen May 26th 1998.

<sup>199</sup> *SKS* 1, 316 / *KW* II, 280.



standing, etc., the truth of the self depends on its being a whole, and poetizing is a means of becoming a whole. In the paradigm of repetition, expectancy, repentance etc., on the other hand, the truth of the self lies in its being before God: God is not part of the polarity of the self, but is irreducibly other to the self. The meaning of the incarnation therefore cannot be grasped poetically or metaphysically, for it is not the self that establishes the relation to the other, but the other who reconciles himself with the world. Climacus can therefore sum up his project by claiming that 'our project went beyond Socrates only in that we placed the god in relationship to the single individual'.<sup>200</sup> From this personal relationship to the eternal other arises a *second aesthetics* (parallel to Haufniensis' notion of a *second ethics* in the Introduction to *The Concept of Anxiety*), a 'poetry of the eternal' where God is the poet, and we are his works of art.<sup>201</sup> The two examples, the child who sees the image of the crucified and the woman who anointed Jesus, illustrate the nature of this 'second aesthetics' established in the incarnation.

With Climacus' notion of the other thus outlined, the question arises to what extent this is an original conception. In one sense Climacus would of course insist that his project is not original at all. For him it is all a matter of thinking through radically enough the implications of the Christian doctrines of sin and reconciliation. But from the point of view of metaphysics, the notion of the other resulting from Climacus' interpretation of the incarnation is worth consideration.

### *Climacus' Notion of the Other and Metaphysics*

Climacus' christologically grounded notion of otherness or difference is, I have argued, anti-metaphysical. Unlike most of the anti-metaphysical thinkers from Hegel to Nietzsche, however, Climacus does not object to the fact that metaphysics implies a separation, but he claims that this separation is of such a kind that it cannot be grasped in the paradigm of traditional metaphysics. It is not because there is no

<sup>200</sup> SKS 4, 298 / KW VII, 101.

<sup>201</sup> Ettore Rocca has pointed out to me the connection between Haufniensis' second ethics and the return of the aesthetic within the Christian paradigm – even though he would, perhaps, not agree with me in seeing this second aesthetic as being grounded in the paradigm of the incarnation.

genuine other, but precisely because the other is genuinely other, that the dichotomies of philosophy are incapable of establishing a genuine notion of the other. I shall attempt to clarify this point by contrasting Climacus' notion of the other to that of two important thinkers of otherness in the history of metaphysics: Hegel and Lévinas. On the one hand, these two thinkers radically oppose each other in their conception of the other; for while Hegel apprehends the otherness as self-differentiation and negativity, Lévinas' project is to grasp alterity beyond negativity, and thus to grasp the other in a positive sense. On the other hand, both thinkers in their effort to reach a metaphysical conception of otherness ground this conception in the notion of the infinite, just as Climacus grounded it in the doctrine of sin.

### *Hegel*<sup>202</sup>

Hegel's speculative philosophy has been described as the endeavour to integrate the irrational into a wider rationality. In the context of the question of the other, this thesis can be reformulated as follows: by welcoming difference, otherness, the irrational into the very heart of reason, Hegel's philosophy excludes the possibility of any genuine otherness and exteriority in relation to reason. Like Climacus, Hegel models his understanding of the other, reconciliation etc. on the teaching of God's self-communication in Christ; but unlike Climacus, the reconciliation implied by the incarnation does not for him consist in a relation to the other as other, but in the integration of all otherness and difference into the realm of spirit.

A distinct view on the relation between antiquity and modernity is involved in Hegel's notion of alterity: the assumed unity of thought and being in the philosophy of antiquity is in modernity, and especially with Kant, replaced by a bipartition. Since in modernity the structures of thought are no longer assumed to coincide with the structures of being, the phenomenal world is cut off from the noumenal world. We have, for instance, a *notion* of God, but we do not know who he *actually* is. This antithesis between concept and actuality and between thought and being is the distinguishing mark of modernity. In the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* Hegel describes the greatness of modernity as the

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<sup>202</sup> These remarks have been written on the basis of Arne Grøn's lecture course on Hegel's philosophy of religion in the spring semester 1998 at the Faculty of Theology, Copenhagen University.

going down [*Vertiefung*] of the subject into itself whereby the finite knows itself to be the infinite and yet is hampered with the antithesis or opposition which it is forced to solve. For the Infinite has an Infinite opposed to it, and thus the Infinite itself takes the form of something finite, so that the subject because of its infinitude, is driven to do away with this antithesis or opposition which is just what has so deepened it as to make it realise its infinitude. The antithesis consists in this, that I am subject, free, a person existing for myself, and therefore I leave the other free as something that is in another sphere and remains there.<sup>203</sup>

In the terminology of this passage, the problem of modernity lies in the fact that 'the finite knows itself to be infinite', and that therefore 'the infinite itself takes the form of the finite'. Consciousness has been absolutized in such a way that it allows for no absolute outside itself. This diagnosis of modernity is, of course, strikingly similar to Nietzsche's conception of the devaluation of the highest values in nihilism. But unlike Nietzsche, Hegel wants to reclaim the ancient view on the unity of being and thought on the premises of modernity. He does this through a redefinition of the relationship between the finite and the infinite. Traditionally, the infinite is seen as standing over against the finite, God over against the world, as two separate realms. But, Hegel argues, when the infinite in this way is understood only as one side of the opposition, it is itself reduced to finitude, since it is delimited by the finite. The true nature of the infinite therefore cannot be grasped from this kind of dichotomy. Rather the infinite must show itself in the finite as that which gives unity and wholeness. The infinite is therefore not something distinct from finite actuality, but actuality as a meaningful whole.<sup>204</sup>

It is this argument that underlies Hegel's critique of Kant's *Ding an sich*. Hegel agrees with Kant in his rejection of the assumption that there should be objects corresponding to the concepts of the soul, the world, etc. But Kant is wrong when he concludes from this that such concepts do not say anything about actuality in itself; for reason does not stand powerless over against actuality but it is itself a power *in* actuality. Kant's assumption that the thing-in-itself is somehow distinct from or behind our conception of it, shows that ultimately he belongs to traditional metaphysics. Against this, Hegel

<sup>203</sup> G. W. F. Hegel *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, Werke vol. 1-20, Frankfurt am Main 1996, vol 17, pp. 207f. / *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* vol. 1-3, tr. by E.B. Speirs & J.B. Sanderson, London 1968, vol. II, pp. 351f.

<sup>204</sup> This is what Arne Grøn calls Hegel's 'basic argument' in the sense that his entire work can be seen as an attempt to develop this argument and apply it in different contexts (Cf. *op. cit.* 178-180 / 184-186).

maintains, actuality is not something behind thought and experience, but it is, on the contrary, the unity and connectedness that appear *in* experience.<sup>205</sup>

In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel models his understanding of the relation between the finite and the infinite on the incarnation as a Trinitarian event. In the incarnation, God the Father differentiates himself and becomes a finite human being. The end point of this separation, the god forsakenness of Good Friday, is at the same time the moment when an absolute reconciliation between the finite and the infinite, God and the world, takes place. In a famous passage from the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, this absolute reconciliation is interpreted as the death of God:

God has died, God is dead, – this is the most frightful of all thoughts, that all that is eternal, all that is true is not, that negation itself is found in God; the deepest sorrow, the feeling of something completely irretrievable, the renunciation of everything of a higher kind, are connected with this. The course of thought does not, however, stop short here; on the contrary, thought begins to retrace its steps: God, that is to say, maintains Himself in this process, and the latter is only the death of death.<sup>206</sup>

In Hegel's interpretation of Good Friday, the death of God is not simply a negation of His being, but it is, on the contrary, God's incorporation of death in His own being. That God has died means that death is no longer outside God, that it has become part of the Kingdom of God, that this most extreme point of separation is included in the reconciling work of the Son. A comparison to Nietzsche suggests itself: both thinkers abolish the dichotomies of traditional metaphysics, but they do this from opposed sides of these dualities as it were. For Hegel the death of God means the incorporation of the finite, death, otherness in the infinite, for Nietzsche it implies that the infinite has been reduced to finitude, but for both thinkers the death of God means the annulment of any genuine otherness.

How does Climacus fit into this picture? Like Hegel, he turns the teaching of God's self-communication in Christ against metaphysics. But if the doctrine of reconciliation for Hegel implied the integration of the irrational into a wider rationality, for Climacus this teaching has the opposite meaning of demonstrating the absolute qualitative difference between God and human existence, and the impossibility

<sup>205</sup> Hegel's critique of Kant's *Ding an sich* appears for instance in the section entitled 'Force and the Understanding: Appearance and the Supersensible World' in the Consciousness chapter of his *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

<sup>206</sup> Op. cit. p. 291 / vol. 3, p. 91.

of any immanent reconciliation of the human and the divine. The basic difference between these two positions, it seems, lies in their respective notions of sin or separation. In Hegel separation is the work of spirit, in Climacus it results from a fall; in Hegel there is separation *in God*, in Climacus there is separation *from God*. They thus mark two opposed interpretations of difference and otherness in relation to modernity. That consciousness takes the form of the infinite in modernity does not, according to Hegel, imply an abolition of the infinity of God, but it shows that the infinite *übergreift* the finite. For Climacus the absolutizing of consciousness in modernity has the opposite effect of excluding the eternal, and making it exterior and other to consciousness.

### *Lévinas*<sup>207</sup>

Lévinas grounds the notion of the other metaphysically on the distinction between totality and infinity. This distinction was introduced in the essay *Philosophy and the Idea of the Infinite* (1957). Lévinas here distinguishes two kinds of knowing. *Either* knowing is the unrestrained process of assimilation in which thought has categories for everything it encounters; everything other falls into place in consciousness, and the other becomes the same. *Or* knowing is an experience of a being that exceeds the categories in which it is to be understood, since it is something other than the content of the idea we have of it; in that case the other remains separated from the thought of it. In the first case knowing is the process through which an object is being neutralized in order that it can be conquered by thought. The other being (especially the other human subject) is turned into something which thought has at its disposal. In his analysis of the other

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<sup>207</sup> The relationship between Kierkegaard and Lévinas has been explored by, among others, Arne Grøn (*Subjektivitet og negativitet: Kierkegaard*, Copenhagen 1998, pp. 267n & 78n), Michael Weston (*Kierkegaard and Modern Continental Philosophy*, London / New York 1994, pp. 156-74), and M. Jamie Ferreira ('Asymmetry and Self-Love: The Challenge to Reciprocity and Equality', *Kierkegaard Studies. Yearbook 1998*, Berlin / New York 1998, pp. 41-59). One of Lévinas' essays on Kierkegaard, 'Existence and Ethics', is contained in *Kierkegaard. A Critical Reader* (Jonathan Rée & Jane Chamberlain (eds.), Oxford 1998, pp. 26-38), but those who have written about Kierkegaard and Lévinas seem to agree that the relationship between these two thinkers must be construed in a way different from what Lévinas himself has suggested.

kind of knowing in which the known is not absorbed by the knowing subject, Lévinas draws on Descartes' notion of the idea of the infinite as a relation in which the *ideatum* exceeds the idea.

In *Totality and Infinity* (1961) the relation to the other is further explored in terms of the idea of the infinite. According to Descartes, the thinking I relates to the infinite as something beyond the idea which the I has of the infinite. The otherness of the infinite is therefore not annulled by being thought. Rather the idea of the infinite is a relation of the same to the other in which, on the one hand, the transcendence of the other does not cut off the bonds of relationship, and, on the other hand, these bonds do not unite the self and the other into a whole. In one important respect, however, Lévinas departs from Descartes. For whereas Descartes construed the idea of the infinite as an object of contemplation, Lévinas argues that precisely because the idea of the infinite is thought's self-transcendence, thinking the infinite must itself involve a kind of transcendence. Instead of contemplation, desire is the form of the idea of the infinite. Desire, Lévinas argues, is 'the infinite in the finite' and the 'more in the less'.<sup>208</sup> Unlike need, desire always seeks beyond its object; the desirable does not satisfy desire, it arouses it.

Lévinas' metaphysics is grounded on this understanding of the idea of infinity; metaphysics is the relationship to the other through the idea of infinity.<sup>209</sup> This notion of metaphysics implies a critique of the primacy of ontology in Western philosophy. In ontology 'the relation to the other is...accomplished only through a third term which I find in myself. The ideal of Socratic truth thus rests on the essential self-sufficiency of the same, its identification in ipseity, its egoism. Philosophy is an egology'.<sup>210</sup> Against the intrinsic tendency of Western thought to remove alterity from the object by seeking to grasp it ontologically, Lévinas maintains that 'metaphysics precedes ontology'.

A comparison with Hegel is here suggestive. If Hegel's phenomenology involves a reduction of otherness to negativity, Lévinas' project can be described as that of re-establishing the positive sense of the other. 'Transcendence Is Not Negativity', as the title of one section in *Totality and Infinity* reads. In a certain sense, Lévinas is more successful in breaking with the Hegelian tradition than some repre-

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<sup>208</sup> Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, tr. by Alphonso Lingis, the Hague / Boston / London 1979, p. 50.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

sentatives of the existentialist tradition. Sartre, for example, understands subjectivity as a negation of the system. But by stressing the negativity of existence, the possibility of its sublation cannot be excluded. On the contrary, it was precisely the negativity of the individual existing person that enabled Hegel to see the individual as sublated in the whole. In other words, existence does not in itself provide any objection against the system, since any existential negativity can be incorporated as an 'unhappy consciousness' in a Hegelian phenomenology.<sup>211</sup> Lévinas, unjustly seeing Kierkegaard as an exponent of this tradition, writes: 'It is not I who resist the system, as Kierkegaard thought, it is the other.'<sup>212</sup> Lévinas breaks free from the Hegelian tradition precisely by maintaining a positive sense of the other.

Lévinas' project does not easily lend itself to comparison with Climacus' anti-metaphysics. While Hegelian idealism clearly belongs to the Greek paradigm of recollection, Lévinas' metaphysical conception of the other seems to be placed between the Greek and the Christian paradigms. For Lévinas the metaphysical other 'is other with an alterity constitutive of the very content of the other. Other with an alterity that does not limit the same, for in limiting the same the other would not be rigorously other'.<sup>213</sup> The question, therefore, is whether Lévinas has managed to ground a notion of the other metaphysically in the idea of the infinite. Is Lévinas successful in expelling negativity from his metaphysical notion of transcendence?

Derrida's critique of Lévinas is worth considering in this respect. According to Derrida, infinity and positivity cannot both meaningfully be attributed to the other. 'The positive Infinity (God) – if these words are meaningful – cannot be infinitely Other. If one thinks, as Lévinas does, that positive Infinity tolerates, or even requires infinite alterity, then one must renounce all language, and first of all the words *infinite* and *other*. Infinity cannot be understood as Other except in the form of the in-finite'.<sup>214</sup> Lévinas' attempt to ground the notion of the other metaphysically thus, according to Derrida, brings to a head the conflict between Hebraism and Hellenism, between messianic eschatology and

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<sup>211</sup> The description of the Kierkegaardian position as an 'unhappy consciousness' dates back to Jean Wahl. Peter Kemp repeats this point with respect to the existentialist tradition in *Lévinas*, Copenhagen 1992, p. 35.

<sup>212</sup> Op. cit., p. 40.

<sup>213</sup> Op. cit., pp. 39f.

<sup>214</sup> 'Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Lévinas' in *Writing and Difference*, tr. by Alan Bass, London 1978, p. 114.

the Greek logos. It is impossible to formulate the position of messianic eschatology by means of the Greek logos, yet no other means of meaningful discourse seems to be available. 'The Greek miracle', Derrida writes, 'is not this or that, such and such astonishing success; it is the impossibility of any thought ever to treat its sages as "sages from the outside"... in welcoming alterity in general into the heart of the logos, the Greek thought of Being forever has protected itself against every absolutely *surprising* convocation'.<sup>215</sup>

In his critique of Lévinas' attempt to ground a notion of the other metaphysically in the idea of the infinite, Derrida thus repeats Climacus' critique of Hegelian metaphysics, even if he does not end up with his christologically grounded notion of otherness.

### *Conclusion*

It has been argued that Climacus' notion of otherness is based on the Christian understanding of sin and incarnation, and that this understanding of otherness runs counter to the tradition of Platonic metaphysics. The relation to the other, according to this view, is not established in understanding, but in the consciousness of sin. Over against Climacus' attempt to ground the relation to the absolute other in the moment of alienation stand Hegel and Lévinas who both, in different ways, attempted to ground the conception of the other in the idea of the infinite as transcendence. The central thought that distinguishes Climacus from both these thinkers is that according to him, the truth of the other is grounded in the untruth of the self, and the relation to the other is established neither through thought nor desire, nor any other aspect of the self, but through the activity of the other, grace. Reconciliation, therefore, does not come about as a temporal fulfilment in the horizon of the self, but as the intervention of the other in the fullness of time.

### Excursus:

#### *Does Climacus' Notion of the Other Allow for a Social Theory?*

What are the consequences of the notion of difference and otherness that arise from Climacus' project for the understanding of the meaning of interpersonal relationships? The question of the role of the hu-

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<sup>215</sup> Op. cit., 153.



man other in Kierkegaard's thought, whether he ends in an ethical solipsism, etc., have been much discussed in more recent secondary literature. The following remarks are provisional. If the only other to whom we can relate as an other is the absolute other, God incarnate, then the significance of human being-in-relationship at a first glance seems to reduce to the level of self-construction. Yet, this obviously does not seem to be the conclusion in Kierkegaard. Rather the importance of the relationship to the human other appears both in the realm of the ethical and in the religious paradox.

(1) In the realm of the ethical the human other has formative influence on the development of the self. This ethical relation to the other must be construed along the lines of a Hegelian dialectic of recognition. Arne Grøn thus argues in *Subjektivitet og negativitet: Kierkegaard* that the relation of the self and the relation to the other person are tangled in such a way that a human being only is a self in relation to another self. This relation has two dimensions: (1) In order for the self to relate to itself it must first be separated from itself; this separation can only take place in relation to another person when the self sees itself as *another than the other*. (2) The task of coming to oneself presupposes that the self is already handed over to others; the task is now to separate oneself out from the inauthentic relationship to others. In this context, Arne Grøn writes, "The others" are not so much the concrete others as the danger in oneself of seeing oneself as one sees others'.<sup>216</sup> The positive relation to the other implicit by the relation of the self can be illustrated by one of Frater Taciturnus' examples.<sup>217</sup> A gambler, heading for an ultimate collapse, suddenly repents and renounces his previous lifestyle. He seems successful in his endeavour to live a new life. But one day he sees a corpse being drawn up from the Seine. Instantly he recognizes a gambler who had been a dear friend of his, and whom he had considered morally superior to himself. If he is not merely to repress the memory of this incident, he must reach some kind of understanding of the fate of his former friend; he must pass a judgment. But this judgment will turn against him, since he had no advantage over him. He therefore becomes uncertain about himself, and he can no longer find confidence in his own converted state. Being unable to pass the judgment himself, he eventually traces everything back to God. His

<sup>216</sup> Arne Grøn, op. cit., p. 228.

<sup>217</sup> SV3 8, 267f. / KW XI, 477-479.

judgment thus becomes 'the humble expression of the doctrine of predestination'. This incident thus forced the converted gambler out of the anaesthesia of future projection and made him contemporary with himself in Socratic ignorance. Even though the converted gambler translated the actuality of this suicide to his own possibility, the fact that he traced their lives back to the same origin (God's predestination) made him 'dialectically sympathetic' towards this person.

(2) The notion of the other implied by the incarnation also has implication for the relation to the human other. Since the relationship to God is established through the relationship to an other, the consciousness of sin and forgiveness frees a person from his isolation and opens him in relation to other human beings.<sup>218</sup> In this way God incarnate becomes, with an expression from *Works of Love*, 'the intermediary' [*Mellembestemmelsen*]. 'Intermediary' does not here indicate that God is between self and other, but He is *the between* (in Buber's sense). That is to say, the self does not need to make a detour round God in order to reach the human other. But the sense of wholeness and meaning must be broken through the relationship to God in the consciousness of sin in order to 'create the space in which the voice of the other can be heard' (to use one of George Pattison's expressions<sup>219</sup>).

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<sup>218</sup> Cf. Arne Grøn, op. cit., p. 347.

<sup>219</sup> Cf. *Agnosis: Theology in the Void*, London 1996, p. 83.



## Part Three

### The Question of Becoming

The preceding chapters have explored the meaning of two of Constantius' basic claims: that repetition is a category of authentic historicity and that it involves a genuine relation to the other. The third claim is that 'this category precisely explains the relation between Heraclitus and Parmenides'.<sup>220</sup> These two names are here not employed in their full historical sense, but as designations of two distinct ways of understanding the relation between being and becoming. 'Parmenides' denotes the view that all is one, and that change and plurality consequently are unreal, whilst 'Heraclitus' denotes the view that everything is in flux. Constantius' claim is now that the category of repetition provides a way in which the relation between these two positions can be explained. In order to appreciate this claim we shall briefly reconsider (1) the concept of repetition and (2) the question of becoming.

(1) In the introduction a distinction was drawn between repetition in the ordinary sense and repetition proper. If by repetition we understand the occurrence of identical moments in a temporal succession, it appears that what is usually called repetition is not proper to its concept. We talk about repetitions in everyday life when something *in* the world recurs. But since the world itself changes continually, each moment is different from all previous moments because it stands in a unique relation to the whole. There are therefore no identical cases within a world. In the proper sense of the word, repetition does not happen to something *in* the world, but only *to* the world itself. From this it follows that repetition is not a matter of *something of the past* occurring anew, rather it is *the entire past* that becomes new in the moment of repetition. Repetition, therefore, according to its essence, is a moment in which *nothing is changed but everything has become new*, or when, in the language of the New Testament, *the*

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<sup>220</sup> SKS 4, 25 / KW VI, 148.

*old has become new* (cf. 2 Cor 5: 17 and Rev 21: 5). With this determination of the concept of repetition we can see how it provides an answer to the question of becoming.

(2) The concept of becoming presupposes *both* that there is something fixed *and* that there is flux, both identity and change. If nothing were fixed, there would be no entities of which it could be said that they undergo a change; and, similarly, if nothing were in flux all talk about change and becoming would lose its meaning. Kierkegaard captures this point in a journal entry from 1842-43: 'Heraclitus said: One cannot step into the same river twice. A disciple wanting to improve it said: One cannot even step into it once. Thereby the nerve is cut; as far as making any sense, the statement becomes the opposite, an Eleatic sentence that denies motion.'<sup>221</sup> The question of becoming is therefore the question of the relationship between what has being or identity, and what does not have being (becoming). Constantius suggests that there are only two possible answers to this question: recollection and repetition. In recollection becoming is traced back to being, in repetition being arises from becoming; in recollection being precedes becoming while in repetition becoming precedes being. The concept of repetition implies, in Climacus' terminology of the paradox, that 'the eternal comes into being in time', and therefore 'the historicizing of the eternal and the eternalizing of history'.<sup>222</sup> These formulations reflect the conceptual meaning of repetition. For repetition – the occurrence of identical cases in succession – implies that identity, being, eternity, etc. do not belong to a realm apart from time, but come into being in time.

Hereby the connection between the question of becoming and the category of repetition has been indicated in advance. This theme will be developed in Chapter Five. Chapter Six compares Kierkegaard's category of repetition with Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal recurrence, thus asking the question of becoming in the context of European nihilism.

<sup>221</sup> *Pap.* IV A 20 / *JP* 3290.

<sup>222</sup> *SKS* 4, 263 / *KW* VII, 61.

## Chapter Five

### Becoming Precedes Being

Constantius' claims concerning the question of becoming appear in the two difficult philosophical passages in *Repetition*.<sup>223</sup> The difficulty of these texts is not due to their conceptual complexity but to their elusive and enigmatic character. Constantius does not map out the train of thought that leads to his conception of repetition, but he leaves it to his reader to reconstruct the arguments that underlie his conception. The preceding chapters have aimed at reaching a point from which the meaning of these two texts can be appreciated.

First there is the opening paragraph of *Repetition* to which I have referred several times already. Like the famous opening of *The Sickness unto Death*, the first sentences of *Repetition* confront the reader with interpretative issues that go right to the heart of Constantius' project. The farcical tone should not be allowed to obscure the centrality and originality of this paragraph.

When the Eleatics denied motion, Diogenes, as everyone knows, came forward as an opponent. He literally did come forward, for he did not say a word but merely paced back and forth a few times, thereby assuming that he had sufficiently refuted them. When I was occupied for some time, at least on occasion, with the question of repetition – whether or not it is possible, what importance it has, whether something gains or loses in being repeated – I suddenly had the thought: You can after all take a trip to Berlin; you have been there once before, and now you can prove for yourself whether a repetition is possible and what importance it has. At home I had been practically immobilized by this question. Say what you will, this question will play a very important role in modern philosophy, for *repetition* is the crucial expression for what 'recollection' was to the Greeks. Just as they taught that all knowing is a recollecting, modern philosophy will teach that all life is a repetition. The only modern philosopher who has had a presentiment of this is Leibniz. Repetition and recollection are the same movement, except in opposite directions, for what is recollected has been, is repeated backward, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forward. (SKS 4, 9 / KW VI, 131)

The second passage appears in the transition between the two parts of the narrative of *Repetition*. At the point where the story of the

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<sup>223</sup> SKS 4, 9 & 25f. / KW VI, 131 & 148f.

young man has come to a temporary conclusion and that of Constantius' journey to Berlin is about to begin we read the following:

Repetition is the new category that is to be discovered. If one knows anything of modern philosophy and is not entirely ignorant of Greek philosophy, one will readily see that this category precisely explains the relation between the Eleatics and Heraclitus, and that repetition proper is what has mistakenly been called mediation.... The Greek explanation of the theory of being and nothing, the explanation of 'the moment,' 'non-being', etc. trumps Hegel.... In this connection, the Greek view of the concept of *kinesis* corresponds to the modern category 'transition' and should be given close attention. The dialectic of repetition is easy, for that which is repeated has been – otherwise it could not be repeated – but the very fact that it has been makes repetition something new. When the Greeks said that all knowing is recollecting, they said that all existence [*Tilværelsen*], which is, has been; when one says that life is a repetition, one says: actuality [*Tilværelsen*] which has been now comes into existence. If one does not have the category of recollection or of repetition, all life dissolves into an empty, meaningless noise. Recollection is the ethnical view of life, repetition is the modern; repetition is the *interest* [*Interesse*] of metaphysics, and also the interest upon which metaphysics gets stranded [*strander*]; repetition is the watchword [*Løsnet*] in every ethical view; repetition is the *conditio sine qua non* for every issue of dogmatics. (SKS 4, 25f. / KW VI, 148f.)

The interpretation of these texts in this chapter proceeds in three steps. First we shall ask what understanding of the history of Western metaphysics underlies Constantius' argument. In Heideggerian language: What kind of destruction of the history of metaphysics is exercised in these texts?<sup>224</sup> Secondly, we shall ask what theory of becoming is involved in Constantius' conception of repetition. In what sense

<sup>224</sup> John D. Caputo has explored Constantius' category of repetition explicitly in relation to Heidegger's destruction of the history of metaphysics (*Radical Hermeneutics*, Indiana 1987, pp. 11-35; and 'Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and the Foundering of Metaphysics', in *International Kierkegaard Commentary* vol. 6, Mercer 1993, pp. 201-224.) Caputo argues that Kierkegaard, despite Heidegger's belittling remarks about his importance for *Being and Time*, had in fact 'already undertaken "the destruction of the history of ontology", the project of the unwritten second half of *BT*, that he was already well under way towards the delimitation of metaphysics and humanism, that he had already set out the limits of existential subjectivity' (1993, 204). Michael Weston takes almost the opposite position in *Kierkegaard and Modern Continental Philosophy* (London & New York 1994). According to Weston, the Heideggerian quest for the meaning of being, both in *BT* and in the later writings is incompatible with Kierkegaard's understanding of the question of existence 'which only has sense in terms of the passion with which we live our lives' (p. 55) Therefore Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel applies just as much to Heidegger (p. 104). Even if one grants that Heidegger took Kierkegaard's criticism of Hegel into account in his understanding of historicity, his search for being would still remain on the level of the aesthetic since it refuses to give up the presumption of the human to determine its own significance (p. 110).

does repetition ‘explain the relation between the Eleatics and Heraclitus’? And thirdly I shall argue that the understanding of being and time implied by the category of repetition is incompatible with a fundamental ontological project à la Heidegger.

### *Repetition as the Stranding of Metaphysics*

There is a significant ambiguity in Constantius’ central statement concerning repetition and metaphysics. Repetition is, on the one hand, ‘the *interest* of metaphysics’ and, on the other hand, ‘the interest on which metaphysics strands’. In order to understand the sense in which metaphysics strands on repetition we must first form a notion of what Constantius means by *Interesse*.

Haufniensis comments on this statement in his long note on *Repetition* in the Introduction to *The Concept of Anxiety*. Metaphysics, he writes, is itself without interest; but ‘in actuality, the whole interest of subjectivity appears and metaphysics is stranded’.<sup>225</sup> Constantius here plays on the literal sense of *Interesse* as ‘between-being’: metaphysics strands when the between-being of subjectivity appears, that is, when it appears that the self is not united with being, but torn between being and non-being.

A series of fragments from the period of *Repetition* (1842-43) explores this literal meaning. One of them, entitled *On the Concepts of E'sse and Inter-esse*, argues that the sciences can be ordered according to the way in which they accentuate being, whether they proceed from being or from *inter-esse*. Ontology and mathematics, it is argued, assume the unity of thought and being; they are therefore sciences of being. Existential science, on the other hand, proceeds from the *inter-esse* of subjectivity. The entry concludes that ‘the advantage of the relation to being is reciprocal’.<sup>226</sup>

When Constantius therefore claims that repetition is ‘the interest on which metaphysics gets stranded’, he challenges one of the basic assumptions of traditional metaphysics, the unity thought and being. In traditional metaphysics, he seems to argue, a human being is understood as an *esse*, an entity, rather than an *inter-esse*, situated between being and nothing. When in modernity the sense of unity gives

<sup>225</sup> SKS 4, 326n / KW VIII, 18n.

<sup>226</sup> *Pap.* IV C 100, cf. IV B 1, 148f. & IV C 99 / *JP* 197, cf. KW VII suppl., 170 & *JP* 2283.



way for an experience of disintegration, then metaphysics 'gets stranded' on the *inter-esse* of subjectivity.

The word 'stranding' also conceals an important ambiguity. Despite most English renderings, metaphysics is neither 'foundered'<sup>227</sup> by repetition, nor does it 'come to grief'<sup>228</sup> upon it. The word *strande* (lit. 'to beach') does indeed harbour the negative connotations of both these translations, but it also means the moment when the boat reaches ashore and comes aground, and when the destination of a sail is reached. This notion thus carries the same ambiguity as Heidegger's notion of 'consummation of metaphysics' (*der Vollenendung der Metaphysic*).<sup>229</sup> Since in modernity metaphysics has run up against repetition in such a way that it 'strands', repetition marks both the fulfilment and the downfall of the metaphysical project.

In order to appreciate the sense in which repetition means the 'stranding' of metaphysics we must consider the historical background Constantius himself suggests. The texts contain a number of hints concerning the historical meaning of repetition. On the basis of these hints we can distinguish three stages the history of development of metaphysics. (1) '*The Greeks*'. This designation covers at least three different positions: (a) The pre-Socratics, who by posing the question of becoming became the starting point of philosophy; (b) Platonism, which captures the basic Greek answer to this question in the doctrine of recollection; (c) the Aristotelian notion of *kinesis*, which constitutes a challenge to this paradigm of thought. (2) *Modernity*. So far, modernity has been unable to overcome the Greek paradigm of recollection. Leibniz is the only one who has had a presentiment of the category of repetition. Hegel's attempt to introduce becoming in logic, on the other hand, is mistaken. (3) *The Philosophy of the Future*. One day when modernity has freed itself from its dependence on Greek thought – when modern man jumps out of the stranded ship of metaphysics – then either the category of repetition will form the basis of a new paradigm of thought, or everything will dissolve into empty noise. We shall now consider how these stages combine.

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<sup>227</sup> Walter Lowrie's translation (1944).

<sup>228</sup> The Princeton translation (*KW* VI, 149).

<sup>229</sup> Cf. Heidegger: *Nietzsche* I-II, Pfullingen 1961, vol. 1, p. 473 / *Nietzsche* vol. 1-4, tr. by David Farrell Krell, San Francisco 1991, vol. 3, p. 3.

## 'The Greeks'

Kierkegaard's concept of 'the Greeks' is difficult to deal with because it indicates a unity which upon closer inspection evaporates. If those thinkers who belong to the paradigm of recollection are 'Greeks', then it appears that several of the ancient thinkers (such as Heraclitus, Socrates, and Aristotle) were no more 'Greeks' than modern thinkers such as those belonging to German Idealism. Since an exhaustive study of Kierkegaard's conception of 'the Greeks' and 'Greek Philosophy' is beyond the scope of this thesis, the following indications must suffice.<sup>230</sup>

As noted in the introduction, there is a historical connection between the problem of becoming and Plato's metaphysics in that Plato provides an answer to the opposition between Heraclitus and Parmenides. Platonism solved the problem of becoming by dichotomizing reality, and by ascribing true being to the atemporal realm alone. Though living in the temporal world, human beings are not cut off from their divine origin. Before the soul entered the body it acquired knowledge of the forms, so that when we learn, we are really recollecting what we once knew, but forgot. The answer to the question of becoming implied by Platonic metaphysics thus in a certain sense affirms Parmenides' rejection of the reality of becoming.

But there are other attempts to come to grips with the question of motion within the Greek tradition. Constantius points to the discussions of *kinesis* (κίνησις) and the relationship between being and nothing. We know from a series of journal entries, that Kierkegaard was for a time very interested in Aristotle's notion of *kinesis* as a transition from a state of possibility to a state of actuality.<sup>231</sup> Kierkegaard interprets this definition existentially rather than logically.<sup>232</sup> *Kinesis* thus comes to denote an existential transition in which the individual passes from a state of possibility or non-being to a state of

<sup>230</sup> For more comprehensive accounts of the influence of Greek philosophy on Kierkegaard see Scopetea, Sophia *Kierkegaard og græciteten. En kamp med ironi*, Copenhagen 1995 and Thulstrup, Niels & Marie Mikulová (eds.): *Kierkegaard's Classic Inspiration*, in *Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana*, Copenhagen 1982.

<sup>231</sup> Cf. Aristotle's *Physics* III A, 1. Kierkegaard's conception of Aristotelian *kinesis* was first influenced by Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann's *Geschichte der Philosophie* I-VI (1798-1807) (cf. *Pap.* IV C 47 & 80 / *JP* 258 & 260), and, in the time after *Repetition*, by Friedrich Adolf Trendelenburg's (1802-72) anti-Hegelian Aristotle interpretation (cf. *Pap.* V A 98 & VIII,1 A 18 / *JP* 3300 & 5978).

<sup>232</sup> Cf. *SKS* 4, 385n / *KW* VIII, 82n.

actuality or being. Whether this is a convincing interpretation of Aristotle is perhaps not the important question in this context. The point for Constantius seems to have been that this notion shows that the question of the meaning of becoming had not been solved in an existentially convincing way with the category of recollection. The Greek category of *kinesis* is at odds with recollection, and as such, Constantius notes, it 'corresponds to the modern category "transition" and should be given close attention'.

### *Modernity*

Constantius only mentions two thinkers from modernity, Leibniz and Hegel. Leibniz, he writes, 'had a presentiment [*Ahnelse*]' of the category of repetition. The reference could hardly be more imprecise. Not only does Constantius not mention which doctrine in Leibniz he is thinking of, he also fails give a hint as to why this doctrine should only be a 'presentiment'. Our understanding of the significance of Leibniz's thought in relation to the category of repetition must therefore be determined by other remarks on his philosophy in Kierkegaard's journals.<sup>233</sup>

In 1842-43 Kierkegaard carefully studied Leibniz's *Theodicee*. Notes from this reading survive along with a couple of other journal references to Leibniz.<sup>234</sup> In his doctrine of *harmonia praestabilita*, Leibniz had, according to one entry, reached an understanding of transition that was close to Kierkegaard's own notion of a pathos-filled transition.<sup>235</sup> Another entry points to Leibniz's conception of the transition from quantity to quality as an important point in his thought.<sup>236</sup> From these and other entries it appears, that 'Leibniz's presentiment' is a loose reference to the doctrine of the pre-established harmony and to the understanding of transition, becoming, being, identity, etc. that follows from this teaching.<sup>237</sup>

According to Leibniz's doctrine of the pre-established harmony, God has placed the entire course of the world into each monad. Thus,

<sup>233</sup> For a careful study of Leibniz's influence on Kierkegaard see Arild Waaler 'Aristotle, Leibniz and the Modal Categories in the Interlude of the *Fragments*' in *Kierkegaard Studies. Yearbook 1998*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin / New York 1998, pp. 276-291.

<sup>234</sup> *Pap.* IV C 9, 12 & 29ff. / *JP* 5580, 2339 & 3073.

<sup>235</sup> *Pap.* IV C 12, cf. 29 / *JP* 2339, cf. 3073.

<sup>236</sup> *Pap.* IV C 37 / *JP* 2367.

<sup>237</sup> Cf. the commentary in *SKS* K4, 33.

for example, when two monads seem to communicate with each other, no real exchange takes place, but God has ahead of time ordered the lives of these monads in such a way that the sequence of their states of mind correspond to each other so that it seems as if they were communicating. Every moment of the individual life is thus pre-determined by God in such a way that this determination does not violate the self-expression of the individual. Rather the moment in which the individual actualizes a possibility in his life, is a moment in which the self-expression of the individual coincides with God's determination for that moment. The divine activity is thus repeated in the activity of the monad.

In *New Essays on Human Understanding*, Leibniz propounds his teaching of identity on the basis of his doctrine of pre-established harmony. From the assumption that each being stands in a unique relation to the universe as a whole, he concludes that two individual beings cannot be so alike that they differ only numerically. If two individual beings were to be identical, they would have to coincide both in space and time, but such coincidence would abolish their individuality. There would not be two identical beings, but only one being. And thus, "the principle of individuation" reduces, in the case of individuals, to the principle of distinction'.<sup>238</sup>

Leibniz' doctrine of identity clearly has implications for the notion of repetition. At a first sight, it seems to demonstrate the impossibility of repetition; for if no two things are identical, repetition, as it is traditionally conceived, is a delusion. However, it is precisely from this position that the meaning of the question of repetition comes to light. For if no identification at all is possible between two moments in the life of an individual, then there is no identity through time. With Leibniz, then, the question of repetition becomes important as the question of identity in time and space.

One should think that Hegel would play an important role in Constantius' remarks on becoming. For Hegel can be seen as advocating a metaphysics of becoming as distinct from the traditional metaphysics of being. While in Platonic metaphysics becoming in the temporal world is seen as derived from and grounded in the immutable world of eternal truth, Hegel has a dynamic notion of the eternal and the infinite. The eternal does not stand over against the temporal, but it is

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<sup>238</sup> Leibniz, G. W. *New Essays on Human Understanding*, tr. & ed. by P. Remnant & J. Bennet, Cambridge 1982, p. 230. Assessor Wilhelm alludes to Leibniz's teaching of identity in *Either/Or* Vol. II (*SKS* 3, 125 / *KW* IV, 126).

engaged in (*übergreift*) it. If Plato's metaphysics favoured the Eleatic answer to the question of becoming, it would thus seem that Hegel's phenomenology favours the Heraclitian solution. Constantius, however, does not engage in a discussion with Hegel. And though his comments on the doctrine of 'mediation' are numerous, they are all dismissive, and not as illuminating as the short reference to Leibniz. Hegel's attempt to introduce becoming into the realm of logic is, according to Constantius, vitiated by the fundamental mistake that he perceived becoming as something immanent. Since Hegel understands becoming as the very essence of existence, he fails to see that it is a *task* that qualifies existence. Kierkegaard writes in a journal entry from this period: 'Motion, the secret of existence as a whole, Hegel explains easily enough, for he says somewhere in the *Phenomenology* that it takes place behind the back of consciousness'.<sup>239</sup> Constantius simply does not acknowledge mediation as an answer to the question of becoming. For him there are only three answers to this question: recollection, repetition and empty noise. Constantius can therefore claim that the Greek discussions of the notion of *kinesis* are more valuable for his category than the Hegelian conceptions of mediation and *Aufhebung*.

### *The Philosophy of the Future*

Thus, in Constantius' view, modernity has not yet discovered the category which will enable it to break loose from the Greeks. This category, repetition, will be discovered only when the 'interest' of subjectivity, rather than the unity of being and thought is made the basis of philosophy. But the question of the between-being of existence leads back to the question about the relationship between being and non-being, i.e., the question of becoming. The meaning of the category of repetition cannot be appreciated as an answer to the questions of modern philosophy, but only from consideration of the question on which traditional metaphysics is grounded, viz. the question of becoming. The category of repetition will enable a philosophy of the future to affirm this temporal world as the birth place the eternal.

We have traced the conception of the history of metaphysics following from Constantius' claim that repetition means the stranding of metaphysics. In modernity the voyage of metaphysics comes to an end

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<sup>239</sup> *Pap.* IV C 59 / JP 1594.

precisely where it set out originally, viz. with the problem of becoming. In this sketch we have assumed that the category of repetition does provide a new answer to this problem. The second, and more basic question, however, has not yet been addressed. This is the question *how* the category of repetition answers the question of becoming, and to what degree this answer is genuinely different from that implicit in traditional metaphysics. To this question, we must now turn.

### *A Theory of Becoming?*<sup>240</sup>

As point of departure for our analysis of the notion of becoming implied by the category of repetition, we take a sentence from one of the passages quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

When the Greeks said that all knowing is recollecting, they said that all existence, which is, has been [*Tilværelsen, som er til, har været til*]; when one says that life is a repetition, one says: all existence which has been, now comes into existence [*Tilværelsen, som har været til, bliver nu til*]. (SKS 4, 25 / KW VI, 149)

Kierkegaard's play on the related Danish terms *Tilværelse* and *Tilblivelse* makes it difficult to make an accurate translation of this text. *Tilværelse* corresponds to the German *Dasein* (though not in the Heideggerian sense); it could be translated 'that which is', 'life', 'existence', 'actuality', in certain contexts even 'the world'. *Tilblivelse*, on the other hand, means 'coming into being/existence' or just 'becoming'. In this text, this distinction between *Tilværelse* and *Tilblivelse* reflects the difference between recollection and repetition: in recollection being [*Tilværelse*] precedes becoming [*Tilblivelse*]; in repetition becoming precedes being. Constantius' formulations are concise and sketchy. But the question of becoming occupied Kierkegaard both before and after he wrote this.<sup>241</sup> In order to spell out more clearly

<sup>240</sup> The thrust of this section appears under the title 'Kierkegaard's Concept of Motion: Ontology or Philosophy of Existence?' in *Kierkegaard Studies, Yearbook 1998*, Berlin / New York 1998, pp. 292-301.

<sup>241</sup> Relevant passages in the published works include the two philosophical passages in *Repetition* (SKS 4, 9-11 & 25f. / KW VI, 131-133 & 148f.); *The Concept of Anxiety* Ch. 3, the opening section (SKS 4, 384-96 / KW VIII, 81-93); *The Interlude in Philosophical Fragments* (SKS 4, 272-86 / KW VII, 72-88); *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* Part 2, Chapter 3, Sections 1-2 (SV3 10, 9-45 / KW XII.1, 301-343).

In the *Papirer* the question of motion can, I believe, be traced in two stages. (1) In some of Kierkegaard's earliest diary entries the problem of motion appears as the search for the Archimedean point. This quest for the firm point from which

the distinction between the two versions of the question of becoming implied by repetition and recollection we shall turn to some of his later remarks on this issue.

Kierkegaard first discussed this distinction in his unpublished response to Heiberg's critique of the book *Repetition* (1843-44). Heiberg, as we have seen, had argued that Constantius had confused the sphere of nature with the sphere of spirit by claiming to have provided an answer to the problem of motion with his category of repetition. In his reply Constantius points out that motion is dialectical in relation to both space (the medium of nature) and time (the medium of consciousness or spirit). In the pre-Socratics the problem was seen as that of the transition of an object from one location to another, but the question should rather be phrased in relation to time. Instead of seeing motion in terms of an object's movement in space, it should be considered existentially as the transition from possibility to actuality.<sup>242</sup>

The decisive clarification of Constantius' claim, however, does not take place in the Public Letter to Heiberg, but later, in his formulation of the distinction between dialectical and pathos-filled transitions [*pathetiske*] in a series of fragments from 1844, and in the further discussion of the transition from possibility to actuality and from non-being to being. We shall consider a number of texts from Kierkegaard's later writings and journals which can throw light on Constantius' formulations.

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motion can start seems to have been particularly intense during the formative weeks in Gilleleje 1835 (*Pap.* I A 68, p. 42; 72 p. 49; cf. 8 p.4 (1834) / *JP* 5099; 5092; cf. 117). Later entries explicitly interpret the notion of an Archimedean point in terms of the problem of motion (*Pap.* VII 2 B 235, p. 52; *Pap.* XI,1 A 462, p. 358 / *KW* XXIV, 160f.; *JP* 2665). (2) During Kierkegaard's first stay in Berlin (1841-42) and especially in response to Schelling's and Werder's lectures, it seems to have become clear to him that the problem with Hegel and speculative philosophy generally lies in their inability to do justice to the temporal nature of existence and in the tendency to gloss over the gap between philosophy and actuality (cf. *Pap.* III C 30 & 31 / *JP* 257 & 1592).

<sup>242</sup> This is a rough summary of the argument concerning motion and repetition in *Pap.* IV B 117 / *KW* VI, Suppl., 300-319 (especially pp. 289f. / 308f.); cf. *Pap.* IV 118, 7 / *KW* VI, Suppl., 321f.

*Dialectical and Pathos-filled Transitions*<sup>243</sup>

The basic thought in this distinction is that the only possible transition from a quantitative determination to a qualitative determination is that of a leap. As examples of such pathos-filled transitions or 'leaps' Kierkegaard mentions the coming of Christianity in the world, reconciliation, the consciousness of sin.<sup>244</sup> If a dialectical transition concerns essence rather than being, a pathos-filled transition is a transition from essence to being; and if a dialectical transition leads from one possibility to another, a pathos-filled transition is a leap from possibility to actuality. Kierkegaard, thus, does not deny that there is such a thing as dialectical transitions, but he points out that this kind of 'motion' does not change anything in actuality.<sup>245</sup>

In a diary entry from 1849, Kierkegaard further explores the meaning of the distinction between dialectical and pathos-filled transitions in terms of the relationship between a conviction and its reasons. We shall consider this entry in some detail.

If I really have a conviction (and this is a determination of spirit in the direction of spirit) then to me my conviction is higher than reasons; it is actually the conviction which *sustains* the reasons, not the reasons which sustain the conviction.... 'Reasons' can lay an egg no more than a rooster can...and no matter how much intercourse they have with each other they never beget or bear a conviction. A conviction arises elsewhere. This is what I...have meant with the problem: 'on the distinction between a pathos-filled and a dialectical transition'. (*Pap. X*,1 A 481 / JP 3608)

Kierkegaard here plays on the literal meaning of the Danish word for conviction [*Overbevisning*] as something that is above proof [*over Bevis*]. The ordinary understanding of the role of reason for the formation of our convictions is hereby reversed; for according to this view, reasons are not the means by which we reach a conviction, but rationalizations after the fact. If becoming convinced or certain (as *overbevist* could also be translated) can be compared to the sudden dawning of a sun in the mind, reasons are the rays thrown into the world by this sun. A conviction is no more sustained by its reasons than the sun is underpinned by its rays. It is not something a person *has*, but rather his or her mode of being in the world. A pathos-filled

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<sup>243</sup> *Pap. V C* 1-9 / JP 2345-2351.

<sup>244</sup> *Pap. V C* 1 & 7 / JP 2345 & 2349.

<sup>245</sup> Cf. *Pap. V C* 6 / JP 2348.



transition, then, means to become convinced beyond reason; to *find rest* in a conviction.<sup>246</sup>

Further on in this entry, Kierkegaard develops this conception of conviction and pathos-filled transitions in the context of the truth claim of Christianity. It is impossible to give reasons for the truth of Christianity, he argues, for reasons do not result in the conviction of faith, but only in an opinion or an understanding. There is therefore 'only one proof for the truth of Christianity: the inward proof, *argumentum spiritui sancti*'. He concludes:

It is not reason which justifies faith in God's son, but just the opposite – faith in God's son is the testimony. It is itself the movement of the infinite, and it cannot be otherwise. The conviction is not grounded on reasons, but reasons are grounded on the conviction [*Ikke Grundene begrunde Overbevisningen, men Overbevisningen begrunder Grundene*]. Everything previous is preparatory study, preliminary, something which disappears as soon as the conviction arrives and changes everything, or turns the relationship around. Otherwise there would be no rest in a conviction, for then to have a conviction would be perpetually to repeat the reasons. The rest, the absolute rest in a conviction, in faith, is simply that faith itself is the testimony, that the conviction is the ground [*det Begrundende*]. (*ibid.*)

This conception of a pathos-filled transition, and of what it means to become convinced throws light on Constantius' claim that in repetition 'existence which has been now comes into existence', whereas in recollection 'existence, which is, has been'. In recollection, a person reaches an *explanation* of a certain entity by translating its actuality to his own possibility, that is, by tracing it back to the realm of concepts and ideas; in repetition, the realm of concepts and ideas itself stands in need of a *transfiguration* in which the old becomes new. Whereas the truth of a certain explanation depends on the reasons that sustain it, the truth of a conviction depends on its ability to sustain and incorporate all reasons.

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<sup>246</sup> In other entries Kierkegaard compares this kind of transition with the moment in which a person passes from a state of unconsciousness to consciousness (*Pap. VII,1 A 186*, p. 126 / *JP* 2809) and with the transition from reading the Bible as a historical document to reading it as the Word of God (*Pap. X,1 A 361* / *JP* 2358).

*The Transition from Possibility to Actuality*<sup>247</sup>

The distinction between a dialectical and a pathos-filled transition has implications for the conception of becoming as a transition from possibility to actuality. Ordinarily, the transition from possibility to actuality is understood as the *actualization of a possibility*. But what does actualizing a possibility mean? A certain action is possible for me when it is consistent with my past. That it is possible means that I will remain essentially unchanged through its actualization. Actualizing possibility, thus, means precisely eliminating any essential change. What happens in a pathos-filled transition, however, is not simply that the possibility of a past moment is turned into present actuality. On the contrary, a pathos-filled transition marks a moment of discontinuity with the past, a new beginning. Rather than being the actualization of a possibility, a pathos-filled transition therefore comes about through the *annihilation of possibility*. This point is elaborated in a number of Kierkegaard's texts.<sup>248</sup> We shall consider two of them.

(1) First, there is the crucial passage on redoubling [*Fordobling*] in the 'Interlude' to *Philosophical Fragments*. Climacus here makes a distinction between nature and a strictly historical being. Nature has come into existence once and for all; it can only be said to be historical in the sense that it has a beginning. A strictly historical being is distinct from nature since in addition to the first coming into existence it contains a possibility of a coming into existence within its own existence. For such a historical being 'the coming into existence that here is shared with the coming into existence of nature is a possibility, a possibility that for nature is its whole actuality'.<sup>249</sup> One can easily overlook the point Climacus makes here. He is not simply saying that a historical being has as an extra possibility the second coming into existence. Rather he is saying that until this second coming into

<sup>247</sup> In order to appreciate Kierkegaard's remarks on becoming as a transition from possibility to actuality, it seems to me that we must introduce a distinction he does not himself make between subjective and objective possibility. By 'subjective possibility' we understand the horizon of possibility within human existence; by 'objective possibility' we understand what is possible for God. The discussion of possibility and actuality in the 'Interlude' to the *Fragments* oscillates between these two meanings of possibility. In our analysis, however, we are only concerned with subjective possibility.

<sup>248</sup> This understanding of the relationship between freedom and possibility also appears in a number of journal entries from 1850-51 (e.g. *Pap.* X,2 A 428; X,4 A 175 & 177 / *JP* 1261; 1268 & 1269).

<sup>249</sup> *SKS* 4, 276 / *KW* VII, 76.

existence has been consummated, actuality (nature) is for such a historical being a possibility. Possibility, thus conceived, is a mode of existence in which the individual has not become who he or she is. The second coming into existence is, consequently, not an actualization of a possibility, but rather the self comes into being through the annihilation of possibility.

(2) A series of important journal entries from 1849-51 deal with the transition from possibility to actuality on the basis of the notion of free choice. In his discussion of free will, Kierkegaard refers to Augustine as the one who has most clearly understood the nature of the will. In his Anti-Pelagian writings, for example, Augustine distinguishes three ways in which a human being can be composed in relation to sin: either he cannot but sin; or he has the possibility of sinning or not sinning; or he is incapable of sinning. Since sin means lack of freedom, it is the third one, Augustine argues, who is free. And he concludes: *Minus est enim posse non peccare majus autem non posse peccare*.<sup>250</sup> Commenting on the view of possibility and freedom expressed in such passages, Kierkegaard writes: 'What Augustine says of true freedom (distinguished from freedom of choice) is very true and very much a part of experience – namely that a person has the most lively sense of freedom when with completely decisive determination he impresses upon his action the inner necessity which excludes the thought of another possibility'.<sup>251</sup> Another journal entry explains that 'the very fact that there is no *choice* expresses the tremendous passion with which one *chooses*'. It concludes:

The most tremendous thing conceded to man is – choice, freedom. If you want to rescue and keep it, there is only one way – in the very same second unconditionally in full attachment give it back to God, and yourself along with it. If the sight of what is conceded to you tempts you, if you surrender to the temptation and look with selfish craving at freedom of choice, then you lose your freedom. And your punishment then is to go around in a kind of confusion and brag about having – freedom of choice. Woe to you, this is the judgment upon you – you have freedom of choice, you say, and yet you have not chosen God. (*Pap. X,2 A 428 / JP 1261*)

Both the 'Interlude' and these two journal entries confirm the notion of a pathos-filled transition as the moment in which a person passes from a state of possibility to a state of being, rather than a moment in which he actualizes a possibility. We shall now see how this transi-

<sup>250</sup> *Opus Imperfectum Contra Secundam Responsionem Iulianem*, Caput 56 (Migne, v. 45, c. 1489-91).

<sup>251</sup> *Pap. X,4 A 177 / JP 1269*.

tion is also analysed as a coming into existence, a transition from non-being to being.

### *The Transition from Non-Being to Being*

In the 'Interlude' Climacus asks: 'How is that changed which comes into existence [*blive til*]?' On the one hand, no attribute is changed when something passes from non-being to being, and, on the other hand everything changes to a new status. This 'change' does not concern the essence of things, but their being. But, Climacus continues, it only makes sense to speak about change if there is something that changes. What, then, is that non-being which in this transition comes into being? He concludes that 'such a being that nevertheless is a non-being is possibility, and a being that is being is indeed actual being or actuality, and the change of coming into existence is the transition from possibility to actuality'.<sup>252</sup>

This conception of the meaning of non-being is developed in a long footnote in *The Concept of Anxiety* Chapter Three. This note could in itself provide the basis for an understanding of Kierkegaard's relation to metaphysics along the lines that have been outlined earlier in this chapter. For Haufniensis here outlines the entire history of Western thought from the Eleatics to modern philosophy and places his own conception of the 'moment of vision' [*Øieblikket*] in opposition to this tradition. He concludes:

Greek philosophy and the modern alike maintain that everything turns on bringing non-being into being, for to do away with it or to make it vanish seems extremely easy. The Christian view takes the position that non-being is present everywhere as the nothing from which things were created, as semblance and vanity, as sin, as sensuousness removed from spirit, as the temporal forgotten by the eternal; consequently, the task is to do away with it in order to bring forth being. Only with this orientation in mind can the concept of Atonement be correctly understood historically, that is, in the sense in which Christianity brought it into the world. If the term is understood in the opposite sense (the point of departure is that non-being does not exist), the Atonement is volatilized and turned inside out. (SKS 4, 386 / KW VI, 83)

According to this passage what separates Christianity from the tradition of Greek and modern thought is the view that 'non-being is present', that non-being rather than being is the point of departure for human existence, and that consequently, the central task of human

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<sup>252</sup> SKS 4, 274 / KW VII, 74.

existence is that of coming into being. By claiming that human beings are cut off from the ground of their being and are in need of salvation, Christianity reconstrues the relationship between being and becoming. Sin implies that human beings are not one with themselves, that actuality has turned into possibility, being into non-being.

I have made this detour into Kierkegaard's later writings in order to bring to light the meaning of Constantius' claim that the category of repetition provides a new answer to the question of becoming. On the basis of the definition of repetition as the moment in which nothing has changed yet everything has become new, we can now see that repetition is precisely a transition from non-being to being. Whereas recollection understands becoming on the basis of being, as privation, repetition understands becoming on the basis of non-being as coming into being, the new creation.

### *Repetition and the Quest of Ontology*

The reversal of the relationship between possibility and actuality, non-being and being, implied by the category of repetition means that a human being cannot maintain the relation of understanding to being. The task corresponding to the notion of being is becoming, not thinking. The paradigm of repetition, therefore, does not allow for an ontology in the traditional sense; not because there is no absolute ground, but because there is no position within existence from which this ground can be thought. In a certain sense, however, Kierkegaard's categories of repetition, the moment, the paradox, etc. do involve ontological claims, but these claims do not form the basis for the understanding of 'the absolute fact' of the incarnation, but they follow from this fact, and consequently they cannot be called ontological in the traditional sense. In a journal entry from 1847, Kierkegaard wrote: 'The paradox is not a concession but a category, an ontological qualification which expresses the relation between an existing cognitive spirit and the eternal truth'.<sup>253</sup> The truth of being cannot be read off the structure of human existence.

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<sup>253</sup> *Pap. VIII,1 A 11 / JP 3089.*

*Revelation and Ontology (Bultmann)*

A comparison with Rudolf Bultmann's theology of existence can help us to clarify this point. In his essay 'The Historicity of Man and Faith' (1930), Bultmann sets out the way in which his theology is indebted to Heidegger's ontological thinking.<sup>254</sup> The essay was written in response to a series of questions concerning Bultmann's dependence on Heidegger's existential analysis raised by Gerhardt Kuhlmann.<sup>255</sup> The first part, consequently, deals with the relation between philosophy and theology in general, whilst the second part poses the question of the relation to the other as the distinguishing criteria between philosophy and theology.

Bultmann's contention in the first part is that theology and philosophy do not stand in a relation of competition, for while they both have human existence as their theme, they deal with it in different ways. While theology *addresses* a human being in his concrete existence, philosophy *inquires* ontologically into the formal structures of human existence, thus making the being of Dasein its theme. 'Philosophy sees *that* Dasein is only a particular, concrete Dasein who is determined by some specific "how"; it speaks of the *that* of this "how", but not of the "how" itself. Theology, however, speaks of a specific "how" – yet not by jumping into a hole that has been left open by philosophy in the totality of what is knowable or in the system of sciences. Rather theology can have its own original motive only because the man, who is determined by that specific "how", has a need of theology for his own realization'.<sup>256</sup>

The question now is how these two ways of seeing human existence combine. In so far as philosophy proceeds deductively from an idea of being that it presupposes, it does stand in a problematic relation to theology, Bultmann argues; but when the philosophical inquiry is phenomenological, as in Heidegger, theology must let itself be referred to the phenomenon itself by philosophy, and 'repeat' the ontological

<sup>254</sup> 'Die Geschichtlichkeit des Daseins und der Glaube: Antwort an Gerhardt Kuhlmann' in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* XI (1930), pp. 339-364 / 'The Historicity of Man and Faith' in *Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings by Rudolf Bultmann*, tr. by Schubert M. Ogden, London and Glasgow 1964, pp. 107-129. Unlike Ogden I translate *Geschichtlichkeit* 'historicality' rather than 'historicity' for the sake of consistency.

<sup>255</sup> Gerhardt Kuhlmann 'Zum theologischen Problem der Existenz: Fragen an Rudolf Bultmann' in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* X (1929), pp. 28-57.

<sup>256</sup> Bultmann op. cit., p. 342 / 109.

analysis on an ontic level. The theological explication of existence in faith thus ‘falls back on [*zurückgreift*] the philosophical analysis of Dasein’.<sup>257</sup> It is possible, for example, to clarify conceptually what Christian eschatology means only by presupposing a philosophical understanding of what ‘future’ means for Dasein, and in Bultmann’s case this means Heidegger’s conception of the future as ‘authentic possibility of being’. Similarly, the concept of sin can be clarified only by referring to the concept of guilt as an original ontological determination of existence; and the Christian conception of love can be clarified only on the basis of the care structure of man’s nature.<sup>258</sup> In a word, ‘faith is not a new quality that inheres in the believer, but rather a possibility of man that must constantly be laid hold of anew because man only exists by constantly laying hold of his possibilities’.<sup>259</sup>

Bultmann illustrates the distinction between philosophy and theology with the analogy of a person without friends who consciously or unconsciously longs for friendship. He knows what friendship is – and yet does not know it. If such a person succeeds in finding a friend, has anything been added to the conception of friendship in his friendless self-understanding? No, nothing would have been added to his conceptual understanding of friendship, but a new *kind* of knowing would have arisen in him. Bultmann concludes: ‘In knowing my friend in the *event* of friendship, the events of my life become new – ‘new’ in a sense that is valid only for me and visible only to me, that indeed only *becomes* visible in the now and thus must always become visible *anew*’.<sup>260</sup> In this way, the event of revelation repeats and brings to life the pre-theological understanding of existence.

In the second part of the essay, Bultmann sets Friedrich Gogarten’s dialogical interpretation of historicity over against Heidegger’s understanding that historicity is grounded in Dasein’s being-towards-death. The question is how Heidegger’s ontological determination of Dasein as limited by death combines with Gogarten’s theological understanding of Dasein as limited by the ‘thou’, and whether Gogarten’s conception of love as the only possibility of authentic historicity is compatible with Heidegger’s view that resolution constitutes historicity. This comparison brings to light the relationship between ontology and theology as Bultmann sees it, since Heidegger, as

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid., p. 348 / p. 113.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., p. 347 / pp. 112f.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., p. 346 / p. 112.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., p. 351 / p. 116.

an ontologist, is not in a position to speak about love, whilst Gogarten, as a theologian of the ontic, can speak meaningfully about love as the basis of authentic existence. Therefore, it is only if it can be shown that these two positions say the same thing in different ways – that deciding for the ‘thou’ is in some sense a resolute anticipation of death – only in that case can it be maintained that ontology and theology combine as described in the first part of the essay.

The outcome of Bultmann’s comparison goes along the lines that philosophy, if it is not to engage in empty speculations about ‘something outside Dasein’, must exhibit the limit that constitutes Dasein as a whole and approach it as something within his or her existence; and death is the only phenomenon that satisfies this condition. Death, we might say, is the negative expression for what love is, just as the concept of friendship is in some sense a negative expression for actual friendship. Theology, therefore does not deny the intimate relation between death and revelation, but it maintains that ‘love is an absolute surrender of the I and only as such “overcomes” death’.<sup>261</sup>

Let us return to Kierkegaard. How does the conception of human existence implied by his category of repetition – that becoming precedes being – combine with Bultmann’s understanding of the relationship between theology and ontology? Let us first consider the image of the person without friends: philosophy gives the concept of a friend; revelation gives the friend. Now, in Bultmann’s interpretation of this image, the concept of the friend precedes the coming of the friend. Philosophy is thus conceived of as providing a *neutral basis* on which the actuality of existence must be understood. How does this image correspond to that of Ingeborg? If the lack of friendship implies for the friendless person a *need for an other*, the absence of Frithiof implied for Ingeborg the disintegration of *her own being*; and if an actual friend would be a temporal fulfilment for the former, a relation to the other would mean a coming into being in the fullness of time for the latter. According to Bultmann, theology must proceed from the being of Dasein, its ontological structure, and the possibilities of existence inherent in this structure. Faith does not add new possibilities of existence to those laid out ontologically, but it ‘lays hold of’ or actualizes one of these possibilities. Faith, then, is not the annihilation of possibility, but its actualization; and it is not a coming into being since the be-

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<sup>261</sup> Ibid., p. 363 / p. 128.



ing of Dasein precedes the becoming of faith. It seems, therefore, that Bultmann, whilst being clearly indebted to Kierkegaard in his conception of the meaning of revelation as repetition, ends up translating repetition back into the paradigm of recollection. The same point applies to the discussion as to whether death or the other provides the possibility of authentic existence in the second part of the essay. Bultmann's understanding of the 'thou' as a possibility of the self comparable to death, excludes the radicality of Kierkegaard's determination of authenticity as being-towards-the-other – that the handle to the door to the other is placed on the outside.<sup>262</sup>

The basic contention of this chapter – that within the paradigm of repetition becoming precedes being, that, consequently, the meaning of the incarnation, rebirth, the moment of vision, the paradox, repetition, etc., is not based on an 'older' ontology, but that within this paradigm any 'ontological' conception of existence must be grounded in 'the absolute fact' – involves the claim that the question of the relation between philosophy and theology must find another answer than the one suggested by Bultmann in the essay discussed above. His contention that they do not stand in a competitive relation because philosophy (recollection) deals with the possibility of existence while revelation (repetition) has to do with its actuality, fails to see that revelation is not the actualization of the possibilities of existence, but their annihilation in the rupture of the moment, that Christianity implies 'the stranding', and not simply the fulfilment, of the endeavours of metaphysics and ontology.

On the other hand, theology cannot do without philosophy if it wants to be more than the expression of individual experiences. If repetition were completely cut off from recollection, it would cease to be a paradigm of thought, and reduce to a kind of mystical openness towards the other which Kierkegaard did not seem to approve of.<sup>263</sup> In exploring the paradigm of repetition, it is therefore not sufficient to contrast it to that of recollection; an account must also be given of their interdependence. Such an account, I suggest, can be

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<sup>262</sup> The point I have here developed in relation to Bultmann's theology of existence could, I believe, also have been made directly on the basis of *Sein und Zeit*. The assumption that fundamental ontology 'must be sought in the existential analytic of Dasein' since Dasein, in its being, has a relation towards its own Being – 'a relationship which itself is one of Being' (12 / 32) – is precisely what the paradigm of repetition denies by maintaining that the relation to being is only established in the moment of becoming.

<sup>263</sup> Cf. the critique of mysticism in *Either/Or 2* (SKS 3, 230-239 / KW IV, 241-250).

given on the basis of the Luther's distinction between law and gospel, rather than on the basis of Heidegger's distinction between the ontological and the ontic.

### *The Distinction between Law and Gospel*

The distinction between law and gospel does not play a spectacular role in Kierkegaard's writings.<sup>264</sup> Yet since this distinction is perhaps the most essential feature of the Lutheran tradition in which he was rooted, we ought not be surprised when we find it reflected at various levels in his thought.

According to Luther, the word of God consists of two parts: the law that kills, and the gospel that brings to life. Gerhard Ebeling defines the word of the law as '*jenes den Mensch bei sich selbst und seinen eigenen Möglichkeiten behaftende, ihn auf sein Tätigsein, auf sein Vermögen ansprechende, darum ihn aber letztlich allein lassende Wort*'.<sup>265</sup> The power of this word does not offer freedom from the bondage of sin; rather, it is the power of the gaoler to hinder any escape. The word of the gospel, on the other hand, sets the person free by addressing him as forgiven, free, beloved. Since the proclamation of forgiveness is not grounded in anything in the person addressed, it defies rationality. Now, obviously these two words stand in stark opposition; the law kills the gospel, and the gospel kills the law. Yet they must be distinguished without being separated. For when they are separated, the proclamation of the gospel will be substituted either by moralism or antinomism – which at bottom is just another form of moralism. The preaching of the gospel, we may say, is the process of distinguishing law and gospel. And the basic task of theology is to make possible that the proclamation becomes this distinguishing process.<sup>266</sup>

<sup>264</sup> The distinction is, however, mentioned and discussed in a number of journal entries. Most importantly in an entry from 1836 where he expresses his fascination with Hamann's contention that reason corresponds to the Pauline notion of the law (*Pap. I A 237 / JP 1540*). When, in a later entry, he criticises Luther's application of this distinction, this does not seem to involve a dismissal of the distinction as such (*Pap. XI,1 A 572 / JP 2554*).

<sup>265</sup> Gerhard Ebeling *Luther. Einführung in sein Denken*, Tübingen 1990, p. 132.

<sup>266</sup> Cf. Ebeling op. cit., p. 129: '*Wenn...das Verkündigungsgeschehen ist, was es zu sein beansprucht, nämlich Heilsgeschehen, dann ereignet sich also darin, dass zwischen Gesetz und Evangelium unterschieden wird, das Heil, während ihre Vermengung nicht ein beliebiges Unglück, ein bedauerliches Versagen, sondern in strengem Sinne das Unheil selbst wäre*'.

How, then, do the word of the law and word of the gospel combine? St. Paul expresses this relation when he writes that 'the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ' (Gal 3: 24). This sounds like a contradiction. We have just defined the law as the word that refers a human being to the horizon of possibilities within his own existence; how can it then be said to 'lead us to Christ'? The answer is that the claim of the law cannot be fulfilled in a human being, and that therefore a human being, as long as he is under the law, is conscious that his life stands in need of justification. The law, then, has two opposite effects on a person: It makes him seek to justify himself by fulfilling the claim set down for an authentic human life, and it makes him realise the impossibility of this fulfilment. In this way, by gradually closing the horizon of possibilities, the law makes the individual become as nothing before God, until the word of the gospel can create new life. For, as Luther writes, '*Gottes Natur ist, dass er aus nichts etwas macht. Darum, wer noch nicht nichts ist, aus dem kann Gott auch nichts machen.*'<sup>267</sup> The gospel is not merely the consummation of the work of the law, but something new, a coming into existence, *creatio ex nihilo*, the point where the annihilation of the law gives way for the new life in Christ.

When being under the law is understood in this way, as being thrown on the possibilities of one's own existence, and when, similarly, the gospel is understood as creation out of nothing, it appears that there is a close connection between this distinction and Constantius' distinction between recollection and repetition. For if repetition means coming into being, recollection is the labour of the self to maintain itself as a meaningful whole. And as the law was 'put in charge to lead us to Christ', so recollection, metaphysics, leads to modernity where it comes ashore on the *interesse* of subjectivity.

In an early journal entry Kierkegaard imagines an accused person who, standing in front of his inquisitor, tells a story that coincides with what actually happened in all substantial matters, and yet is completely different because it omits the fact that he is guilty. This, Kierkegaard suggests, is an image of the relationship between philosophy and Christianity.<sup>268</sup> The imagery at first seems surprising. Has not the endeavour of much modern theology aimed at justifying itself in the face of the autonomous modern individual? Should not philosophy rather have been depicted as the inquisitor, and Christianity

<sup>267</sup> Quoted by G. Ebeling, op. cit., p. 149.

<sup>268</sup> *Pap.* II A 493 / JP 3274.

as the accused one? Kierkegaard's point seems to be that the philosophical discourse is based on the sense that life stands in need of justification, and that modern philosophy is the ongoing denial of this need, the repression of the need of redemption.

Constantius' claim that repetition is the category corresponding to the essence of modernity implies no more, no less, than that which was expressed in the title of Heidegger's posthumously published interview: 'Now Only a God Can Save Us'.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> *Der Spiegel*, May 31, 1976. The interview was conducted in 1966.

## Chapter Six

### Repetition and Nihilism: Kierkegaard and Nietzsche

We have now reached the final step of the projected reconstruction of Kierkegaard's category of repetition. If in the earlier chapters we have continually taken our point of departure within Kierkegaard's own writings attempting to understand other positions in the history of philosophy from *his* position, we shall now approach his category of repetition from the point of view of nihilism. The aim is to bring to light Kierkegaard's repetition and Nietzsche's eternal recurrence as parallel attempts to posit a paradigm of thought on the basis of the event of nihilism.

#### *Comparing Kierkegaard and Nietzsche*

The juxtaposition of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche involves the double task of both giving an account of the profound similarities between their work and of pointing out the fundamental opposition between the positions they represent. Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger mark the two extreme points in the tradition of this juxtaposition.

In the series of lectures entitled *Vernunft und Existenz* (1935), Jaspers depicted the development of Western thought as the ongoing struggle to ground reason on its own basis by integrating the irrational in a new rationality. This development culminates in Hegel and German idealism. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, on the other hand, represent two distinct ways of opposing this basic tendency of Western thought. In these two thinkers the primacy of thought in relation to being is substituted respectively by the primacy of faith and by that of the will to power. Hereby, 'a sudden shift' (*ein Ruck*) thus took place in Western thought, the meaning of which is still to be discovered.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> Karl Jaspers *Vernunft und Existenz*, München 1973, pp. 7-34.

According to Heidegger, such a comparison is rooted in a misconception of the nature of Kierkegaard's work. Despite many references to Aristotle, Kierkegaard remains essentially remote from his thought, and therefore he does not properly belong to the history of Western thought. 'For Kierkegaard is not a thinker, but a religious writer, and indeed not just one among others, but the only one in accord with the destining belonging to his age. Therein lies his greatness, if to speak in this way is not already a misunderstanding'.<sup>271</sup> Heidegger's point seems to be that if Kierkegaard is standing outside the tradition of Western thought, as he takes him to be, then there is no common ground on which the comparison between him and Nietzsche can take place. For the difference must then either be grasped from within the history of philosophy (in which case Kierkegaard is dismissed as not being a thinker) or from the point of view of religiousness (where Nietzsche's atheistic thinking is seen as defiance in relation to God). The gap between the worlds of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard thus remains unbridgeable, not simply because these worlds are incompatible or mutually exclusive, but because no thought and no argument leads from one world to the other – because this gap can be crossed only in a leap.

If Jaspers sees in Kierkegaard's and Nietzsche's thought corresponding expressions of the radicalizing of the conflict *within Western thought* between reason and existence, Heidegger understands these two writers as responding to the questions of modernity and nihilism from two different positions: Nietzsche's thought stands within the tradition of Platonic metaphysics and brings it to an end, while Kierkegaard's critique of metaphysics is not rooted in that tradition, but in his individual religiousness. Jaspers and Heidegger thus represent an alternative: *either* Kierkegaard is a metaphysical thinker in the tradition following from Plato and can then be compared with Nietzsche as a representative of the consummation of this tradition (but as somebody standing within it, he cannot be seen as providing a way out of it); *or* he stands outside that tradition and criticizes it from a position that is essentially incompatible with it.

In the Introduction I endorsed Heidegger's characterisation of Kierkegaard as a 'religious writer'. Kierkegaard's work, I argued, does not hang together as the progressive clarification of one funda-

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<sup>271</sup> 'The Word of Nietzsche: "God is Dead"' in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, tr. by William Lowitt, Harper and Row Publishers, New York 1977, p. 94.

mental thought, but as stages in a development that is determined by the call to become a Christian. This development culminates in his final position, captured in his dictum 'I am not a Christian' which is not to be understood 'objectively', but 'subjectively' as the expression of a self-understanding in which the truth of the age is revealed. It is unclear whether this was what Heidegger meant when he wrote that Kierkegaard was a religious writer rather than a thinker, but this distinction is applicable beyond its Heideggerian context. I have called Kierkegaard a religious writer rather than a thinker in order to indicate that the significance of his work can be appreciated only when it is seen as a response to a persistent calling rather than an unfolding of a basic thought, and that the 'open-endedness' of his writing is therefore not an accidental defect of it, but its essential meaning.

But if the traditional comparisons of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche as thinkers in the tradition of Western metaphysics are excluded because one stands outside it, the other within it, this very difference in relation to the tradition provides a new point of comparison. Heidegger himself, in fact, makes this comparison when he calls Nietzsche a thinker in contradistinction to Kierkegaard whom he calls a religious writer. Such a comparison, however, cannot be a neutral juxtaposition, but it will have to be a confrontation in which the points of similarity are traced back to the fundamental either-or that separates the work of these two writers. This is the kind of comparison this chapter intends to make. The point is to show how Nietzsche, from within the tradition of Western thought, running his head against its boundary, as it were, proposes his version of repetition, the eternal recurrence of the same, as his anti-Platonic answer to the question of nihilism, while Kierkegaard from his Christian position proposes the incarnational conception of repetition as his answer.

The first part of this chapter gives a general presentation of Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence and of Heidegger's 'confrontation' with this doctrine, the second part compares Nietzsche's eternal recurrence with Kierkegaard's repetition, and the conclusion outlines the two distinct understandings of nihilism implied by these conceptions.

### *Nietzsche's Doctrine of the Eternal Return of the Same*

Nietzsche's claims concerning eternal recurrence give rise to a series of interpretative issues. Is it merely a theory of the self or does it involve cosmological claims? How important is this doctrine in

Nietzsche's thought as a whole? How does the idea of recurrence fit into the history of metaphysics? What status should be ascribed to the remarks on this conception in the *Nachlass*? Broadly speaking, Nietzsche scholarship has suggested three ways in which these questions can be answered.<sup>272</sup>

First, the eternal recurrence has been understood by some scholars as a *cosmological* theory that offers an account of time and of the constitution of the universe.<sup>273</sup> Considered as a scientific theory the conception of recurrence seems to be based on the following reasoning: given the finitude of the world, there is only a finite number of possible constellations of the world; and given the reality of motion and the infinitude of time these constellations will have to be repeated in gigantic intervals. This argument has been subject to rigorous philosophical criticism,<sup>274</sup> and many Nietzsche scholars seem to agree that, considered as a scientific theory, the conception of recurrence is rather embarrassing.

Secondly, the conception of recurrence has been construed in terms of its *existential* meaning. This is the position taken by Alexander Nehamas in his celebrated study, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*.<sup>275</sup> According to Nehamas, 'the eternal recurrence is not a theory of the world, but a view of the self'.<sup>276</sup> Nietzsche's doctrine of recurrence involves the traditional conception of the self as an acting subject being substituted by a literary model. In a literary fiction the actions of the persons do not 'express' their personalities, but their personalities are constituted by these actions. There is no doer behind the deeds. With

<sup>272</sup> There are interpretations that do not fit any of these categories, e.g. Karl Löwith's cultural historical interpretation in *Nietzsches Philosophie der ewigen Wiederkehr des Gleichen*, 3rd ed., Hamburg 1978.

<sup>273</sup> This view is developed e.g. by Arthur C. Danto in: *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, New York 1965, pp. 203-209.

<sup>274</sup> For example by Georg Simmel in his classical refutation: three wheels of equal size rotate on the same axis. On the circumference of each wheel is marked a point. In the starting position these three points form a straight line. If the second wheel rotated twice as fast as the first, and if the speed of the third wheel was  $1/\pi$  of the speed of the first, the initial line-up would never recur. This disproves the theory that, given the conditions mentioned above, a system would have to repeat itself (Georg Simmel *Schopenhauer und Nietzsche*, Leipzig 1907, pp. 250f.; cf. Kaufmann *Nietzsche, Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, New Jersey 1974, p. 327).

<sup>275</sup> Esp. Chapter Five: 'This Life – Your Eternal Life'. In a similar line of thought, Walter Kaufmann argues that the cosmological aspect of Nietzsche's doctrine is an unnecessary superstructure to the experience of world affirmation. The eternal recurrence, he writes, 'was to Nietzsche less an idea than an experience' (*op. cit.*, p. 323).

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.



this view of the self as a literary character, the distinction between what is accidental and essential in a human life collapses. For to change even seemingly insignificant actions of a character in a narrative would, in the ideal case, change the entire story. To wish that one moment of the past would have been different therefore implies wishing to be another person. And, moreover, since according to Nietzsche, everything in the world is interrelated in such a way that the properties of a thing are nothing but its effects on other things, to wish oneself to be different implies wishing the world as a whole to be different. It follows from this that only by affirming the entire history of the world is it possible to coincide with oneself. In such a moment of world affirmation a person's life undergoes a transfiguration in which it becomes 'a perfect narrative'.<sup>277</sup> As an example of life as literature, Nehamas refers to the narrator in Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*. The story of all the pointless things he did in order to become an author concludes the moment when he is ready to start writing his first novel. In this book all the unconnected events of his life will turn out to be part of a pattern, since they all enabled him to become an author in the end. The 'framework supplied by this perfect novel...which keeps turning endlessly back upon itself, is the best possible model for the eternal recurrence', Nehamas suggests.<sup>278</sup>

(3) The third branch of interpreters understands Nietzsche's teaching of recurrence *ontologically*. According to this view, this teaching is neither primarily a theory of the constitution of the universe, nor an existential vision, but a doctrine concerning the meaning of being. The importance of Martin Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche (or his 'confrontation' (*Auseinandersetzung*) with Nietzsche as he consistently calls it) for this line of interpretation can hardly be exaggerated. Undoubtedly Ernst Behler is right that 'the post-World War II occupation with Nietzsche consists to a great extent in responding di-

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<sup>277</sup> Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid., p. 168. It seems to me that Nehamas' interpretation of the eternal recurrence as a view of the self, rather than theory of the world runs into the problem of drawing a clear distinction between the self and the world. For if, as Nehamas argues, the 'authentic' self is not a subject that is separated out from the world, if it 'is' the world in such a way that by affirming itself, it affirms the world, how, then, can a view of the self be separated from a theory of the world? The conception of 'life as literature' thus stands in need of a conception of the world as 'a work of art that creates itself'. What Nietzsche was groping to find when he wrote about eternal recurrence was not simply a model for selfhood, but a basis in which such a model could be grounded.

rectly or indirectly to the challenge emanating from Heidegger's Nietzsche'.<sup>279</sup>

### *Heidegger's Nietzsche*

Most of the relevant work by Heidegger is gathered in his four volume *Nietzsche*, a compilation of lectures and manuscripts from the period 1936-45, published in 1961.<sup>280</sup> A concise summary of all this is provided in his essay, 'The Word of Nietzsche: God is Dead' (publ. 1952).<sup>281</sup>

Heidegger sees the tradition of Western metaphysics as resting on two pillars. At the beginning stands Plato who posited a realm of suprasensory being beyond the sensory world of becoming; at the end stands Nietzsche, in whose thought the suprasensory is changed into an unstable product of the sensory. In this inversion of Platonism the tradition of metaphysics is consummated, and Western metaphysics divests itself of its possibilities of continuation. But Nietzsche's thought does not provide a new point of departure for thinking. His inversion of Platonism remains essentially metaphysical because, as a mere counterpart, it continues to share the essence of that against which it defines itself.

Nietzsche thus brings the tradition of Platonic metaphysics to an end by demonstrating that *nihilism* is the essence of metaphysics. By its positing of the highest values in another world, Platonism harbours the possibility that these values become unattainable and thus valueless because life appears unsuitable and utterly incompetent for the realization of these values. What happens in nihilism is that 'we see that we cannot reach the sphere in which we have placed our values'.<sup>282</sup> A 'revaluing of all previous values' is therefore needed. This revaluation can take place in two ways. Either the old values are simply substituted by new ones (socialism, Wagnerian music, etc. thus taking the place of the traditional metaphysical values); this is called

<sup>279</sup> Ernst Behler 'Nietzsche in the Twentieth Century' in *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, ed. by Bernd Magnus and Kathleen M. Higgins, Cambridge 1996, p. 314.

<sup>280</sup> *Nietzsche* I and II, Pfullingen 1961 / English translation by David Farrell Krell, *Nietzsche* Volumes One and Two and *Nietzsche* Volumes Three and Four, San Francisco 1991.

<sup>281</sup> 'Nietzsche's Wort "Gott ist tot"' in *Holzwege*, Frankfurt 1952 / tr. by William Lovitt in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, London 1977, pp. 53-112.

<sup>282</sup> KSA 12, 293 / *The Will to Power*, tr. by Walter Kaufmann and J.R. Hollingdale, London 1968, § 8.

*incomplete nihilism* because the new values replace the old ones without changing the place of value. *Completed nihilism*, on the other hand, does not simply replace one set of ideals with another, but it does away with morality itself as the basis of the positing of ideals. The revaluing of all previous values thus requires a new principle of valuation, and Nietzsche proposes 'the will to power' as such a value-positing principle. While Platonism measured everything against the ideas, Nietzsche's measure is the will to become stronger. In this context 'will', according to Heidegger, means 'commanding' rather than 'desiring' or 'striving after'. In commanding, a person 'proves superior to himself in that he ventures even his own self'. The will to power therefore implies self-conquest, rather than self-realization. But the notion of the will to power does not provide a genuinely post-metaphysical point of departure. Rather, it marks the extreme point of the inversion of Platonism. For Heidegger, Nietzsche's philosophy thus appears as a 'metaphysics of the will to power'.<sup>283</sup>

However, it was possible for Nietzsche to bring the tradition of Western metaphysics to an end only because he had a presentiment of a new beginning. His inversion of Platonism was therefore guided by a thought that is not present in his writings, or present only 'as unthought'. This is not simply because Nietzsche was unable to clarify and express this thought. Rather he deliberately 'withheld' his most profound insight. After 'the thought of thoughts' came to him in August 1881, 'Nietzsche planned to lapse into silence for the following ten years', but this 'timing' sadly came to grief when he was overcome by insanity in 1889.<sup>284</sup> Nietzsche's thought was therefore essentially unfinished at the time when he finished writing. In order to understand him as a thinker it is therefore not sufficient to 'interpret' his writings. The reader must himself carry his thought to completion on the basis of his *Nachlass*. This was what Heidegger intended to do in his 'confrontation' [*Auseinandersetzung*] with Nietzsche.<sup>285</sup>

What was it then that, according to Heidegger, remained unthought in Nietzsche's work? From Nietzsche's late writings and from the *Nachlass* it appears that his basic thought was closely connected to his notions of the will to power and the eternal recurrence of the same. In his writings these notions stand unmediated over against each other. On the one hand, his philosophy is 'a metaphysics of the

<sup>283</sup> *The Word of Nietzsche* pp. 75-77.

<sup>284</sup> *Nietzsche* I, 264f. / *Nietzsche* vol. 2, pp. 13f.

<sup>285</sup> *Op. cit.* I, 424 / *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 162.

will to power'; on the other hand, it is guided by the eternal recurrence as 'the thought of thoughts'. Heidegger suggests that the obscure relation between these two basic conceptions 'lay behind the restlessness of Nietzsche's thinking during this final creative period'.<sup>286</sup> His own 'confrontation' therefore points to the need of bringing together the will to power and the eternal recurrence in a basic ontological thought.

Heidegger now suggests that Nietzsche's two basic conceptions unite in the question concerning being and becoming posed by the pre-Socratics. Nietzsche's position marks a new, post-metaphysical point of departure for thought only in so far as it provides a new answer to this question. Heidegger repeatedly quotes a note from 1885 to this end: 'To *impress* upon becoming the character of being – that is the supreme *will to power*.... That everything recurs is the closest *approximation of a world of becoming to a world of being – the high point of the meditation [Betrachtung]*'.<sup>287</sup> In this note the will to power fuses with the eternal recurrence in a ontological conception of being as something that is impressed or stamped [*aufprägen*] upon becoming. Commenting on this note, Heidegger writes: 'The will to power, as the *constitution* of being, is as it is solely on the basis of the way to be which Nietzsche projects for being as a whole: *Will to power, in its essence and according to its inner possibility, is the eternal recurrence of the same*'.<sup>288</sup>

Many contemporary scholars have criticized Heidegger's 'confrontation' with Nietzsche for resting on inadequate principles of interpretation.<sup>289</sup> His conception of the unfinished character of Nietzsche's work, in particular, has been met with general scepticism. Nietzsche, Heidegger argued, intended to write a book entitled *The Will to Power* (not to be confused with the collection of notes and fragments published under that title), that would give the main structure of his thought, and reduce all the published works to the status of 'foreground'. Nietzsche never finished this work, but a number of notes for this book survives. Consequently, Heidegger locates what he calls 'Nietzsche's philosophy proper' in the *Nachlass*. However, since Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari's chronological editions of Nietz-

<sup>286</sup> Op. cit., I, 426 / op. cit., vol 2, p. 163.

<sup>287</sup> KSA 12, 312 / *Will to Power* § 617.

<sup>288</sup> Op. cit. I, 467 / op. cit., vol. 2, p. 203.

<sup>289</sup> Cf. Alan D. Schrift *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation. Between Hermeneutics and Deconstruction*, New York and London 1990, pp. 14-20.

sche's *Nachlass* (1979) this idea of Nietzsche trying to finish his *magnum opus* when he became insane must be considered a myth. Today it therefore seems problematic to base an understanding of the authorship as a whole on the *Nachlass*.

It should be noticed, however, that Heidegger's 'confrontation' is not so much grounded in an understanding of the timing of the authorship as in his conception of a 'thinker'. According to this conception every 'thinker' thinks only a single thought, and this thought is always about Being as a whole. However, in so far as the 'thinker' remains within the tradition of Western metaphysics, he is unable to express this thought since the truth of Being is concealed in this tradition. A 'thinker' must therefore be understood on the basis of the primacy of what remains unthought in his thinking. What remains unthought in Nietzsche's thinking is thus the same as what remains unthought in the entire history of Western metaphysics: the truth of Being.<sup>290</sup> It is this conception of a 'thinker' that underlies Heidegger's confrontation, and this conception is unchallenged by the misunderstanding of his conception of the timing of the authorship.

There are other methodological problems in Heidegger's *Nietzsche*.<sup>291</sup> But one of the great achievements of this work is that it gives an account of Nietzsche's thinking as a whole in which the thought of recurrence occupies the prominent place which Nietzsche himself ascribed to it. The following remarks on the thought of recurrence are indebted to Heidegger's view of Nietzsche as the last metaphysical thinker, though they do not always follow him in his readings.

### *The Eternal Recurrence and the Moment of Vision*

In the section on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in *Ecce Homo* (1888), Nietzsche famously describes how the idea of the eternal return, 'the highest formula of affirmation', came to him in August 1881 while he was walking through the woods near the lake of Silvaplana '6,000 feet beyond man and time'. He describes the months preceding this moment as a time of pregnancy. And the moment itself he describes partly as a giving birth, partly as a being reborn.<sup>292</sup> This passage indi-

<sup>290</sup> *The Word of Nietzsche*, p. 97.

<sup>291</sup> For a critical view of Heidegger's Nietzsche see (in addition to Alan D. Schrift's book) Laurence Lampert *Nietzsche's Teaching: An Interpretation of 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra'*, New Haven 1987.

<sup>292</sup> KSA 6, 335 / *Ecce Homo*, tr. by J. Hollingdale, Penguin Classics, p. 69.

cates that this ‘thought of thoughts’ did not come as the conclusion of a train of thought, but that it originated in a moment of ‘rebirth’. We have only understood the meaning of the doctrine of return when we have been able to appreciate this connection between the moment and the thought of return. We shall trace this connection in two steps, first in Nietzsche’s second *Untimely Meditation*, ‘On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life’ (1874), and, secondly, in the section ‘On the Riddle and the Vision’ from Part Three of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

(1) ‘On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life’ is a polemical attempt to clear the way for an anti-Hegelian and non-eschatological philosophy of history. Germany suffers from a ‘fever of history’, Nietzsche argues; an antidote is needed if German culture is not to be suffocated by history. For cultural creativity only comes about ‘by submitting to laws that are not the laws of the fluctuations of history’.<sup>293</sup> The Christian and Hegelian conceptions of history as a progressive striving towards a conclusion must be substituted by the conception that the meaning of history lies in the great moments of creativity. ‘[T]he goal of humanity cannot lie in its end but only in its highest exemplars’.<sup>294</sup>

The essay opens with the celebrated depiction of the conflict between the historical and the unhistorical in human consciousness. This conflict is clearly perceived when we observe the feeling of envy with which a historical person observes the grazing cattle. Being ‘fettered to the moment and its pleasure or displeasure’, they do not know what is meant by yesterday or today, and therefore they are ‘neither melancholy nor bored’. This is a hard sight for man to see; for what they have is precisely what he wants, yet cannot have because he refuses to be an animal.<sup>295</sup> Nietzsche describes the burden of history as follows:

And it is a matter of wonder: a moment, now here and then gone, nothing before it came, again nothing after it has gone, nonetheless returns as a ghost and disturbs the peace of a later moment. A leaf flutters from the scroll of time, floats away – and suddenly floats back again and falls into the man’s lap. Then the man says ‘I remember’ and envies the animal, who at once forgets and for whom every moment really dies, sinks back into night and fog and is extinguished forever. (KSA 1, 248f. / *op. cit.*, p. 61)

<sup>293</sup> KSA 1, 310 / *Untimely Meditations*, tr. by R. J. Hollingdale, Cambridge 1995, p. 106.

<sup>294</sup> KSA 1, 317 / *op. cit.*, p. 111.

<sup>295</sup> KSA 1, 248 / *op. cit.*, p. 60.

Being unable to return to the state of forgetfulness, yet aching for the happiness of that state, a human being is thus torn between the historical and the unhistorical. He is not completely historical, for a completely historical person would be interwoven in universal history in such a way that the past would encompass the present moment; he would, as it were, be mentally removed from the present. On the other hand, he is also not unhistorical like a child or an animal. Rather, he maintains himself with a certain sense of continuity 'drawing the horizon around himself'.<sup>296</sup> A person's ability to draw the horizon around himself is a measure of his health. Some people, Nietzsche argues, possess so little power of integration that they can perish from a single experience 'like a man bleeding to death from a scratch'. These people must continually shield themselves against the world in order to maintain themselves in it. Stronger individuals have more 'plastic power'; they are only little affected by the most dreadful disasters and even by their own wicked deeds. But only the most powerful and tremendous natures can widen their horizons infinitely so that 'there is nothing left to suggest that there are people, passions, teachings, goals lying beyond it'. Such a nature would 'draw to itself and incorporate into itself all the past, its own and that most foreign to it, and as it were transform it into blood'.<sup>297</sup> In this most powerful nature, the fever of history would not be cured by adding the unhistorical (drawing a horizon), but by transforming the historical to something suprahistorical. While historical individuals see history as a progression, this suprahistorical individual would be able to see that 'the world is complete and reaches its finality at each and every moment'.<sup>298</sup>

Nietzsche calls the kind of history that perceives the goal of humanity on the basis of the suprahistorical nature of its greatest individuals *monumental history*. The great moments in the lives of great individuals constitute a chain, 'a range of human mountain peaks', that stretches through world history.

These individuals do not carry forward any kind of process but live contemporaneously [*zeitlos-gleichzeitig*] with one another.... [O]ne giant calls to another across the desert intervals of time, undisturbed by the exited chattering dwarfs who creep about beneath them, the exalted spirit-dialogue goes on. (KSA 1, 317 / *op. cit.*, p. 111)

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<sup>296</sup> KSA 1, 248-252 / *op. cit.*, pp. 61-63.

<sup>297</sup> KSA 1, 251 / *op. cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>298</sup> KSA 1, 255 / *op. cit.*, p. 66.

Since these great individuals, despite their world historical separateness, live contemporaneously, they constitute 'a kind of bridge across the turbulent stream of becoming'.<sup>299</sup>

It is, significantly, in the discussion of monumental history that Nietzsche introduces the idea of eternal recurrence as a *conditio sine qua non* for his conception of the suprahistorical.<sup>300</sup> This idea, he argues, is still beyond reach for modern man because we understand history causally. Only if the nexus of cause and effect were one day to be broken, would it become conceivable that the future could once again produce precisely the same. It would then be clear that the rise of most powerful individuals is not effected by anything else, but that they are 'effects in themselves'. All the endless branches of interconnected events in the history of the universe, all the fragments of a history are brought together in these great individuals, and redeemed by being rooted in the suprahistorical. In *The Gay Science* (1882) Nietzsche depicted this redeeming power of the great individuals in a section entitled '*Historia Abscondita*'.

Every great human being exerts a retroactive force: for his sake all history is placed in the balance again, and a thousand secrets of the past crawl out of their hiding place – into *his* sunshine. There is no way of telling what may yet become part of history. Perhaps the past is still essentially undiscovered!<sup>301</sup>

Nietzsche, then, introduced the notion of recurrence in his discussion of historicity as the ultimate antidote against 'the fever of history'. For only when the course of the world is conceived of as being circular, can the conception of monumental history gain its truly redemptive meaning; and only then can the great individuals stand out from the chain of history as suprahistorical beings, contemporaneous with each other, and the dictum thus be true that 'the goal of humanity cannot lie in its end, but only in its greatest exemplars'. However, the notion of recurrence is not *proclaimed* in this text. It is only *suggested* as a way in which the conception of monumental history could gain significance. 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life' was written six years before that decisive moment when, according to *Ecce Homo*, the idea of eternal recurrence dawned on Nietzsche, and some ten years before he made this idea the basic conception in the Zarathustra book. Yet, this essay shows that the genealogy of the

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> KSA 1, 261f. / op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>301</sup> KSA 3, 404 / *The Gay Science*, tr. by Walter Kaufmann, New York 1972, p. 104.



later concept of the eternal recurrence begins with the question of the historicity of existence.<sup>302</sup>

(2) 'On the Vision and the Riddle'. Ten years after 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life' in the third part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche proclaimed his later version of the doctrine of recurrence. According to *Ecce Homo* this doctrine is 'the basic conception' of the Zarathustra book. It is 'basic', not in the sense that it is brought out and developed as the theme of this book, but in the sense that it underlies the book as a whole. The communication of 'the most abysmal thought' is therefore mostly indirect. The point is not so much to articulate a new philosophical doctrine as to create a character in whose mouth the doctrine of recurrence becomes redemptive; and the doctrine of return is consequently not so much a teaching Zarathustra communicates, as a mode of existence which he embodies.

The opening sections of Part Three of this work describe how Zarathustra crosses over the rocky island and departs on a sea voyage that separates him from the isles that symbolized his hope in Part Two. 'The most abysmal thought' is the goal for his voyage. In Section Thirteen, 'The Convalescent', Zarathustra is finally redeemed by thinking the thought of eternal recurrence. The end of the voyage has thus been reached. Section Two, 'On the Vision and the Riddle' occupies a central place in this Part. It is in this section Nietzsche most clearly communicates the meaning of the thought of recurrence. The two images employed in this passage, the gateway and the young shepherd, provide the most accessible avenue to the understanding of the eternal recurrence.

The opening passage of 'On the Vision and the Riddle' provides a kind of reader's guide. Zarathustra makes it clear that he does not speak to the passengers on the ship, who only venture out on the deep in order to reach another haven, but to the seafarer who 'embarks with cunning sails on terrible seas', and to those who 'do not want to grope along a thread with cowardly hand'. Rather, 'where you can guess, you hate to deduce'. What is the difference expressed in Zarathustra's distinction between passengers and seafarers, and between those who deduce and those who guess? For the passenger, the voyage is the means by which he can reach another haven; for the sailor, on the other hand, the sea is not simply a means, but a

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<sup>302</sup> Cf. Walter Kaufmann *Nietzsche*, p. 319.

place where he belongs. He who deduces may want to venture into unknown land, but he cannot let go of his Ariadne thread, by which he can always find his way back again. Guessing a riddle, on the other hand, demands a kind of leap. A riddle is not a ladder that can be climbed, but a point of take-off. The reader, therefore, who wants to hear Zarathustra's words must not be sober in reason, but 'drunk by riddles'.

To these seafarers Zarathustra tells the following. One night he was defiantly climbing upwards on a mountain, gloomy and bitter. On his shoulder sat a creature 'half dwarf, half mole, lame, making lame'. This was his old archenemy, the spirit of gravity, who had weighed him down right from the beginning of the narrative. Realising that the dwarf would be unable to endure the thought of recurrence, Zarathustra stops, and begins to challenge him: 'It is you or me'. The dwarf now jumps off Zarathustra's shoulder and crouches on a stone, curious to hear him tell about his thought. There is a gateway before them where they have stopped. Zarathustra explains to the dwarf that this gate is the moment of vision [*der Augenblick*]:

It has two faces [*Gesichter*]. Two paths meet here; no one has yet followed either to its end. This long lane stretches back for an eternity. And the long lane out there, that is another eternity. They contradict each other, these paths, they offend each other face to face [*sie stoßen sich gerade vor den Kopf*]; and it is here at this gateway that they come together. The name of the gateway is inscribed above: 'Moment'.<sup>303</sup>

The imagery is suggestive. What is a gateway? It is something you pass through, a transition from one place to another. It both divides and connects; two realms are at once separated and brought together by a gateway. The gateway is both the point at which the two lanes meet, and the point from which they start out in their opposite directions. It is the origin of the opposition between the two lanes, the past and the future, just as it is the overcoming of this opposition. Nietzsche's play on the double meanings of the words *Gesicht* and *Augenblick* is lost in the English translation. *Gesicht* can be rendered either 'face' or 'sight', and *Augenblick* means both 'moment' and 'the glance of an eye' (just as *Øjeblik* in Danish). The gateway where the two faces looking in opposite directions are united is itself the glance of an eye. But how does the thought of recurrence come into this? A clue is given in the questions that Zarathustra asks the dwarf.

<sup>303</sup> KSA 4, 199f. / *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, tr. by Walter Kaufmann, New York 1974, pp. 157f.

He first asks the dwarf whether he believes that 'these paths contradict each other eternally'. The dwarf answers 'contemptuously': 'All that is straight lies. All truth is crooked; time itself is a circle'. Zarathustra gets angry at this answer; but significantly he does not simply accuse the dwarf for having misunderstood the thought of return, but for 'making things too light'. In what sense has the dwarf made things too light? The dwarf has understood that time is a circle and that what appears to be two lanes in opposite directions is in fact only one lane, but in all this he has failed to see the significance of the gateway. Zarathustra therefore continues his questioning:

[I]f everything has been here before – what do you think, dwarf, of this moment? Must not this gateway have been here before? And are not all things knotted together so firmly that this moment draws after it all that is to come? Therefore – itself too? For whatever *can* walk – in this lane out there too, it *must* walk once more. (*loc cit.*)

What has escaped the dwarf in his rational explanation of recurrence is that the doctrine of recurrence bestows a new meaning on the moment. Precisely because everything turns in a circle, Zarathustra indicates, moments *can* stand out as decisive and redemptive for the circle as a whole. The dwarf's account is 'too light' because it leaves out the separating and bringing together implied by the image of the gateway. The lightness in question is that imposed by the rational mind on everything it grasps. Zarathustra, in a word, accuses the dwarf for being among those who 'grope along a thread with cowardly hand'.

As Zarathustra explains the thought of recurrence to the dwarf, he speaks more and more softly because he fears his own 'thoughts and the thoughts behind [his] thoughts'. Then all of a sudden the gateway and the dwarf have disappeared. Nearby he hears a dog howling, and his thought races back to childhood where this sound filled him with pity. Once again Zarathustra takes pity on the dog and follows the sound. And there, in the bleak moonlight, he sees a young shepherd lying on the ground, writhing and gagging in spasms. Out of his mouth hangs a heavy, black snake. While he was asleep the snake had crawled into his throat and bitten itself fast. Zarathustra tries to tear it out of his throat, but in vain. Then he cries to him: 'Bite! Bite the head off! Bite!' The shepherd bites, and he spews the head of the snake far away and jumps up, 'no longer a shepherd, no longer human – one changed, radiant *laughing!*'

The interpretation of this image is helped by some remarks in Section Thirteen, 'The Convalescent'. Here we learn that the young

shepherd is Zarathustra himself, and that it was his great disgust with men that crawled into his throat and choked him.<sup>304</sup> This suggests that the image of the young shepherd should be read as an explication of the image of the gateway. The dwarf corresponds to the snake (*Geist der Schwere – eine schwere Schlange*) and the gateway corresponds to the bite. Nihilism is the ‘spirit of gravity’ that causes all the values we pose above the temporal world to fall down, and Zarathustra’s feeling of ‘disgust’ for human beings is the nihilistic sentiment that the aim is lacking even in the greatest human beings.

The text describes two distinct ways of attempting to get rid of the heavy snake: tearing it out or biting its head off. What is the difference? In order to tear it out Zarathustra would have to be stronger than the snake. Nihilism would then have to be something accidental to his life, something against which he could turn his essential will. This is perhaps the kind of Schopenhauerian pessimism that Nietzsche calls *incomplete nihilism*: The old values are gone, and all attempts to put new ones in their place are in vain. Biting off the head of the snake, on the other hand, does not presuppose any superior power over the snake. In biting, the head of the snake is as it were taken in and enclosed by the person who bites. Only when nihilism in its extreme form has been allowed in, can its head be bitten off; nihilism must somehow be accepted before it can be separated out and spewed away. This is *completed nihilism*: no new values are sought to fill the place of the old ones, but a new place of valuation is found – not in some inner space that has been rescued from nihilism, but in the very essence of nihilism. Of this ‘extreme nihilism’, Nietzsche wrote on June 10 1887:

Duration ‘in vain’, without end or aim, is the most paralysing idea, particularly when one understands that one is being fooled and yet lacks the power not to be fooled. Let us think this thought in its most terrible form: existence as it is, without meaning or aim, yet recurring inevitably without any finale of nothingness: ‘the eternal recurrence’. This is the most extreme form of nihilism: the nothing (the ‘meaningless’) eternally. (*KSA* 12, 213 / *Will to Power* §55)

The result of this biting off the head of the snake is therefore not that the shepherd can be himself again, but rather that he is transfigured. In extreme nihilism the individual lets go of his humanity and becomes an overman.

<sup>304</sup> *KSA* 4, 274 / op. cit., p. 219.

These two ways of relating to nihilism, tearing and biting, correspond to the two different versions of the doctrine of recurrence, represented by the characters of the dwarf and Zarathustra. For the spirit of gravity the recurrence of the same implies that no moment has any weight since nothing new or decisive can take place in it, but only that which has already been and will be repeated innumerable times in the future. His logic is simple: everything recurs – nothing comes out of it – everything is in vain – nothing is worthwhile. Zarathustra's own interpretation is only indirectly stated in the text. But his logic is less self-evident: everything recurs – it depends on each moment – everything matters. Is this distinction tenable? Must not in the end Zarathustra's version be reduced to that of the spirit of gravity?

In his interpretation of this text, Heidegger attempts to discern 'the rainbow bridge' leading from the dwarf's pessimistic version of the doctrine of recurrence to Zarathustra's world affirmation. The key, he suggests, to understanding the difference between these two versions is to appreciate that the doctrine of recurrence is not a thought 'in itself', but 'the essentially overcoming thought'. 'Overcoming' is not simply the content of the thought, but its essence. The spirit of gravity thinks the thought of recurrence according to its content, but he fails to think it according to its essence. Thinking the thought of recurrence is for him like 'driving a vehicle through it': the thought is hereby overcome, but his thinking (the vehicle) remains essentially unchanged. The thinker who thinks this thought genuinely, by contrast, does not simply grasp it, but he is himself overcome by it. There are, according to Heidegger, two conditions for thinking this thought aright. It must be thought both in terms of the moment of vision, and as the overcoming of nihilism. Only when we expose ourselves to the condition of need that arises with nihilism and to the possibility of decision implied by the moment of vision can we think the thought of recurrence as the essentially overcoming thought. In such thinking the spirit of gravity is overcome, for in it 'the thinker as such moves in the ring of eternal recurrence, indeed in such a way as to help achieve the ring, help decide it'.<sup>305</sup>

The two texts we have so far considered are separated by the moment in 1881 when the thought of recurrence for the first time came

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<sup>305</sup> *Nietzsche* I, 445-447 / *Nietzsche*, vol. 2, pp. 182f.

to Nietzsche in its full meaning; but they are thematically connected in so far as they are both concerned with the questions of historicality and becoming within modernity, and both suggest a doctrine of recurrence as the *conditio sine qua non* for the solution of these problems. In 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life', the thought of recurrence made possible a suprahistorical sphere in which the great individuals, set apart from the fluctuations of history, live contemporaneously with each other. In 'On the Vision and the Riddle', the doctrine of return is proclaimed as constitutive for the moment of vision, rather than for the suprahistorical. Common to both these texts is the sense that only when the paradigm of traditional metaphysics is substituted by the paradigm of recurrence will the crisis of modernity turn out to be birth pangs of a new world rather than signs of death of the old. This suggests that a comparison with Constantius' project might be in order.

*Constantius' Repetition and Nietzsche's Eternal Recurrence*<sup>306</sup>

At first sight Nietzsche's notion of recurrence and Kierkegaardian repetition may seem to be so incongruous that no essential comparability remains. After all, Nietzsche's conception implies the *endless* recurrence of *the universe*, whereas Kierkegaard's category only implies a *one off* repetition of *consciousness*. But upon closer inspection it appears that eternal recurrence *also* involves a repetition of consciousness to the second power, viz. in the notion of the overman, and, similarly, that Kierkegaardian repetition is *also* grounded in an event that is exterior to consciousness, viz. in the incarnation. The doctrines of the incarnation and eternal recurrence involve two distinct ways of 'historicizing the eternal and eternalizing the historical' (Climacus<sup>307</sup>), and, by way of consequence, two distinct post-metaphysical ways of understanding the self as a historical being. The correspondence between Nietzsche's overman and Kierkegaard's be-

<sup>306</sup> An important work on this theme is Wolfgang Struve's Habilitationsschrift *Die neuzeitliche Philosophie als Metaphysik der Subjektivität. Interpretation zu Kierkegaard und Nietzsche*, in *Symposion, Jahrbuch für Philosophie* Bd 1 1949, pp. 207-335. This dissertation was submitted to the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Freiburg in 1948 (!); significantly, Heidegger's name remains virtually unmentioned throughout this study.

<sup>307</sup> SKS 4, 263 / KW VII, 61.

liever thus reflects a correspondence between the doctrines of recurrence and the incarnation.

A clue to the understanding of the relationship between Constantius' and Nietzsche's conceptions of repetition is given by their shared claim to have found a new way around the question of being and becoming. The very concept of repetition implies a re-conception of the relation between being and becoming. For whereas traditional metaphysics discerns identity *behind* change, repetition – identical cases in temporal succession – implies that identity resides *in* succession. If, traditionally, the temporal is understood on the basis of the eternal, in repetition, the eternal is understood on the basis of the temporal. And further: both Constantius and Nietzsche place this re-conception of the meaning of becoming in the context of the opposition between Parmenides and Heraclitus. Implicit in this reference to the pre-Socratics lies the destruction of the history of metaphysics. For both thinkers, the notion of repetition provides another starting point for philosophy than that of Platonic metaphysics.

However, Kierkegaard's and Nietzsche's applications of their respective categories took them in opposite directions. For while they share the view that the concept of repetition indicates the way out of the realm of Platonic metaphysics, they sought this exit in opposite extremes of that realm, as it were, Kierkegaardian repetition assuming the absolute otherness of the eternal, and Nietzschean recurrence abolishing any genuine otherness. We shall attempt to bring out this fundamental difference by juxtaposing their respective conceptions of the historicity of existence and the destining of the age.

### *Two Views on the Historicity of Existence*

The understanding of historicity implied by Nietzsche's doctrine of recurrence is captured in the section entitled 'On Old and New Tablets' in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: 'To redeem what is past in man and to recreate all "it was" until the will says, "Thus I willed it! Thus I shall will it" – this I call redemption and this alone I taught them to call redemption'.<sup>308</sup> Elsewhere Nietzsche calls this redemptive world-affirmation *amor fati*.<sup>309</sup> The conception of historicity implied by Kierkegaardian repetition makes up the counterpart of this position. For in Kierkegaard, repentance and expectancy rather than *amor fati*,

<sup>308</sup> KSA 4, 249 / op. cit., p. 198.

<sup>309</sup> E.g. *The Will to Power* § 1041.

designate the authentic historicity. Repentance, however, does not so much here designate a way of coming to grips with the past as the substitution of the sense-giving relation to the past with the relationship to God as the redeemer of the past; and expectancy, similarly, is not directed towards temporal fulfilment, but towards God who makes the old new in the fullness of time. For Nietzsche, the past is completed and redeemed at the moment when this world is affirmed as *my* world, and when this life is affirmed as my *eternal* life; for Kierkegaard, the past is redeemed only when, like Job, we let it go in order to receive it again as a gift from above.

In order to clarify this distinction I shall return to Michael Theunissen's essay 'ὁ αἰτῶν λαμβάνειν. *Der Gebetsglaube Jesu und die Zeitlichkeit des Christseins*'.<sup>310</sup> Theunissen's approach differs from that of the present study in that he wants 'to speak philosophically about Jesus', and therefore bases his analysis of the temporality of Christian faith on the example and the teaching of Jesus rather than on the incarnation christologically conceived.<sup>311</sup> But the way in which this essay distinguishes Greek and Christian temporality, Kierkegaardian and Nietzschean historicity, is very illuminating. Platonic metaphysics and Christianity in contradistinction to modern theories of time, assume that human beings must suffer in time, Theunissen argues, but they disagree on what causes their suffering. This difference reflects two different conceptions of the relationship between time and eternity. Whereas in Greek metaphysics, the eternal stands in opposition to time so that no rest is possible within temporality, in Christianity 'the eternal itself breaks into time, but as the absolutely other', so that the relationship to the absolutely other becomes the point of rest.<sup>312</sup>

The concept of eternity that has lost its meaning in post-idealistic thought is not the eternity proclaimed in Christianity, but the metaphysical eternity of Platonism. The Christian notion of eternity is for instance expressed in Kierkegaard's notion of temporality as the point 'where time constantly intersects eternity and eternity constantly pervades time'.<sup>313</sup> The eternity implied by Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence, on the other hand, belongs to the Greek tradi-

<sup>310</sup> In *Negative Theologie der Zeit*, Frankfurt am Main 1997, pp. 321-377.

<sup>311</sup> Theunissen intended his essay to be a '*Beitrag zur Phänomenologie des von Jesus vorgelebten Menschseins*' (p. 325).

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 367.

<sup>313</sup> *SKS* 4, 392 / *KW* VIII, 89.



tion of understanding the eternal on the basis of time by way of negation. The Greeks would point to the movements of the heavenly bodies as examples of movements that because of their regularity were closer to eternal rest than unpredictable human life in time. The eternal, they thought, was reflected in the historical only in so far as the historical is bound to the regularities of nature. Nietzsche now carries the tendency to its extreme conclusion where the historical is absorbed in nature. When in Nietzsche's eternal recurrence all becoming, also that of history, is bound to the circle of nature, the Greek understanding of the eternal on the basis of time again assumes the form of the myth which it originally had. Over against this Greek conception of the eternal stands the Biblical promise that God will intervene and 'create new heavens and a new earth' (Is 65: 17).<sup>314</sup>

Theunissen thus depicts Christian faith and eternal recurrence as two opposed attitudes to the problem of historicity. Since the past has dominion over the future in a historical being, there is a tendency for history to become fate. As historical beings we are involved in 'a universal relationship of compulsion' of which we cannot free ourselves, precisely because of the universality of this relationship. A historical being thus stands in need of redemption. The redemption of Nietzsche's overman, *amor fati*, consists in allowing the dominion of the past to be so complete that the distinction between past and future dissolves. Christian faith, on the other hand, assumes the presence of the eternal as the absolute other in time, and the penetration of the present by the future in Christian eschatology involves a reversal in the hierarchy of the temporal ecstasies. For, Theunissen concludes in a sentence that captures the main contention of this study, '*Erlösung gibt, als Handeln Gottes, der Zukunft ihre Souveränität gegenüber der Vergangenheit zurück. In der von ihr freigesetzten Wirklichkeit verschlingt sich die Zukunft mit der Vergangenheit in der bestimmten Weise, dass sie über das Geschehene eine Macht gewinnt, in der die Macht Gottes sich manifestiert*'.<sup>315</sup>

<sup>314</sup> Op. cit., 368f.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 371. Theunissen's conception of eschatological time experience is in many ways similar to that of Rudolf Bultmann in *History and Eschatology* (Edinburgh University Press 1958). Bultmann takes as his point of departure the problem of historicism: the lives of human beings seem to be intertwined with the course of universal history in such a way that 'our own deeds do not, so to speak, belong to ourselves' (p. 4). Bultmann answers this challenge by pointing to the New Testament proclamation of Christ as the eschatological event in which the man of faith is freed from his bondage to the past; but this freedom from the past is a freedom

What most profoundly links Kierkegaard and Nietzsche together is the acute sense that modern human beings stand in need of redemption from history. The Young Man's third letter to Constantius ('I am nauseated by life' etc.) is one of the most powerful expressions of that sentiment of which Zarathustra's heavy black snake is an image: the inability to liberate the present from the crushing burden of the past. It is this sense that the age is being choked by history that makes them abandon the traditional conception of the self on the ground of its past in search of a new paradigm of historicity. In order to grasp the basic distinctness of their positions, we must therefore consider their respective view on the crisis of modernity.

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from oneself. The resulting ambiguity between what a person is because of his past, and what he is because of his relation to the future is analogous, Bultmann argues, to the Lutheran statement *simul iustus, simul peccator*. He concludes: 'It is the paradox of Christian being that the believer is taken out of the world and exists, so to speak, as unworldly and that at the same time he remains within the world, within this history. To be historical means to live from the future... In principle, the future always offers to man the gift of freedom; Christian faith is the power to grasp the gift. The freedom of man from himself is always realised in the freedom of historical decisions' (p. 152).

It seems to me, however, that an essential difference remains. For while Heidegger's existential ontology for Bultmann, in some of his writings, provides the foundation for his eschatological theology, Theunissen maintains that the understanding of existence implied by the Biblical concept of salvation and by Kierkegaard's existential dialectic is incompatible with that of *Sein und Zeit*. '*Existenzdialektik und Existential ontologie handeln von wesentlich verschiedenen Weisen der Selbstsein*', Theunissen writes (p. 351).

Perhaps we ought, tentatively, to distinguish three positions here. (1) That of Bultmann, who (at least sometimes) attempts to ground his conception of the eschaton on the philosophy of existence; (2) that of Theunissen, who instead of a rationally encouraged transcendence from within, prefers the proleptic prefiguration [*Vorschein*] of the eschaton. Yet Theunissen endeavours to grasp this eschatological time experience by non-theological means; he wants to 'speak philosophically about Jesus', instead of turning the Christian proclamation against the philosophical discourse. Perhaps Habermas is right when he accuses Theunissen of deriving the means for his project 'from the fundamental metaphysical principles of the very Platonism that he seeks to overcome'. (Jürgen Habermas 'Communicative Freedom and Negative Theology' in *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, Matustik, Martin J. & Westphal, Merold (eds.), Indiana University Press 1995, pp. 182-98). (3) Kierkegaard's position, as he is interpreted, e.g. in this study, harbours an irreducible conflict between philosophy and revelation, recollection and repetition. I have argued in the preceding chapter that according to Kierkegaard, the relationship between philosophy and revelation mirrors that between law and gospel in Luther. We can express this with a dictum from one of the Scandinavian revivalist traditions: 'The Gospel has only been truly preached when it has been preached in such a way that it can be misunderstood'.

*Two Views of the Crisis of Modernity*

Nietzsche's and Heidegger's conception of nihilism as the logic guiding the history of metaphysics implies that modernity is the epoch in which the death of God is brought to light as the essence of metaphysics. In this epoch nihilism appears to be the outcome of the metaphysical depositing of the value of this world in another world. For in modernity it becomes clear that the metaphysical *distinction* between the here and the beyond implies a *separation* that cannot be overcome from within subjectivity. The insight that the history of metaphysics reaches its consummation in devaluation of the highest values in nihilism therefore belongs to modernity.

Kierkegaard's notion shares this view of the critical importance of modernity in the history of humankind. But his conception of the crisis of modernity is less unified, and a more comprehensive account would have to distinguish several stages in the development of his view. Yet, when we juxtapose Nietzsche's nihilism and Kierkegaard's understanding of the stranding of metaphysics in modernity, an essential difference can be easily discerned on two levels. First, Kierkegaard claims the inescapability of the God relation. From this point of view, the sentence 'God is dead' is an expression of this relation, not of its absence. Second, he does not understand this relation on the basis of a two-world thinking as a positing of values but, along the lines of the prophets of the Old Testament, as an unhappy love relationship. Both points are expressed in a journal entry from the time of *Repetition*. Kierkegaard quotes a sentence from *Theologia Germanica* which, he argues, 'can be regarded as a motto of the age':

'If we are no longer spiritually rich, we forget God and take pride in being lost' (see chapter 10, p. 41). It is this condemnation, so to speak, the age wants to have before God, for the clue to its despair is precisely this: that there is a God. It is like the girl who, when she cannot get her way with the beloved, spites him by falling in love with another. She only proves thereby her dependence on him, and the clue to her first [read: second] love is precisely her relationship to the first one. (*Pap. IV A 165 / JP 744*)

This imagery suggests that the crisis of modernity does not result from the death of God, but the claim that God is dead results from the fact that 'we are no longer spiritually rich'. The crisis of faith in modernity, according to Kierkegaard, does not result from the fact that we have become autonomous, but the autonomy of the modern consciousness is a countermeasure to the crisis of faith.

However, as long as we simply consider Kierkegaard's and Nietzsche's views on the age, we still fail to see their essential differ-

ence. This difference cannot be grasped on the basis of their understanding of the age, but only on the basis of their understanding of themselves in relation to the age. Both writers epitomized such a self-understanding in a single dictum. Nietzsche's position is captured in his claim: 'God is Dead', and Kierkegaard's final position is expressed in his confession: 'I am not a Christian'. If we understood these two sentences in their contexts, we would, I suggest, be in a position to appreciate the essential difference between the two paradigms of modern thinking and the two kinds of historicity embodied in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.

Let us first turn to Nietzsche. In the well-known Section 125 of *The Gay Science*, the sentence 'God is Dead' is attributed to 'the Madman'. In the bright hour of the morning the madman ran to the marketplace with a lantern in his hand crying: 'I seek god! I seek god!' The people at the market place who did not believe in god yelled and laughed at him: 'Why, did he [god] get lost? Is he hiding? Is he afraid of us?' The madman then 'jumped into their midst, pierced them with his glances' and cried: 'Whither is god? I shall tell you! *We have killed him* – you and I! All of us are his murderers!' The paradox of the death of god is, according to the imagery of the madman's speech, that by this event humankind has become guilty of an action of which it was incapable. 'Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must not we ourselves become gods to seem worthy of it?' The task facing human beings after the death of god is to become worthy of being god's murderers by affirming this world as *their* world. Seeing that the people in the marketplace had not been able to receive his message, the madman smashed his lantern against the ground and went away. 'I come too early...' he reasoned, 'This deed is more distant from them than the most distant stars – *and yet they have done it themselves*'. Instead of the marketplace, the madman went into various churches where he sang the *requiem aeternam deo*. For, he explained, 'what are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchres of god?'<sup>316</sup>

In order to understand the madman's words, we must first of all understand to whom they are spoken. They are spoken in the marketplace. The reference inherent in this image is not so much to the busyness of everyday life, as to the place of spiritual intercourse, the place where Socrates met with people. Unlike the people standing

<sup>316</sup> KSA 3, 480-482 / Quoted from Walter Kaufmann's *The Portable Nietzsche*, New York 1968, pp. 95f.

around and conversing with each other at this place, the madman comes running in, crying after god. The words 'god is dead' are thus spoken by a person who claims to seek god against those who say that they do not believe in god. In contrast to the *metaphysical* claim of some kinds of atheism that there is no god, the madman makes the *historical* claim that 'we have killed god'.

Nietzsche's use of the light image in this text conveys a sense of the basic difference between the madman and his listeners. The people in the marketplace who deny that there is a god, laugh at the madman because he comes with a lantern in the light hours of the morning. The madman, however, explains his behaviour: 'we have unchained this earth from the sun', he says, so that 'lanterns must be lit in the morning'. When the people in the marketplace can still indulge in the light from the sun, this is because they have not yet sensed that after the death of god 'it is night, and more night is coming on all the while'. They still think they can receive light from a source exterior to themselves, and have not realised that in a godless world, the individual himself must carry his own light. The light metaphor refers both to the Copernican world view and to Plato's allegory. With respect to the former, the 'unchaining' of the earth from the sun means that 'we are straying through an infinite nothing', and that 'we are plunging continually'. With respect to the latter, it indicates that the sensible has been cut off from the source of its being, that 'what was holiest and most powerful of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives'. In the end of his speech, the madman explains why the people of the marketplace still sense the light and the warmth of the sun, while he has to carry a lantern: light requires time, he argues; the light of a star, for instance, can be sensed for a long time after it has stopped shining. In vain he has therefore proclaimed the death of God for, 'this tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering'.

Under the assumption that, on some level, Nietzsche can be identified with the madman, we can here sense the self-understanding in relation to the age that has determined his work. Those thinkers of his age who deny god and thus unchain the earth from the sun can do this only because they maintain themselves in the light of the sun. This discordance between the already and the not-yet of god's death in modern consciousness, makes modern man a transitory figure, a bridge to the overman who no longer stands in need of a god. The madman sees this destiny of the age, but he is unable to communicate it to the people in the marketplace who has not yet sensed the

darkness and coldness of a godless world. He therefore leaves the marketplace, and goes to the churches where he shows honour to the deceased god. When we juxtapose the philosophers in the marketplace who deny god's existence and the madman who shows reverence to the memory of god, we get a glimpse of Nietzsche's self-understanding in his age. The essential difference is that while the madman proclaims the death of god as a *historical event* the meaning of which will become manifest in the distant future, the people in the marketplace assume that they can get rid of god by simply denying his existence. For them, we might say, the non-existence of god is conceived as a *metaphysical doctrine*. When, as in Nietzsche, the death of god is understood historically in terms of the event of nihilism, it designates the moment when the truth of existence can no longer be grounded in the relationship to an other, but in the annihilation of any other.

Kierkegaard's dictum 'I am not a Christian' must also be grasped in terms of his understanding of the destiny of the age. It appears in *The Moment* [*Øieblikket*], a series of pamphlets from the last months of Kierkegaard's life in which he made his attack on Christendom. The strange eschatological sentiment that carries Kierkegaard's writings from this period finds expression in the motto of one of his most shocking articles: 'But at midnight there was a cry'.<sup>317</sup> The sentence is taken from the parable about the ten virgins who went out to meet the bridegroom; they had all fallen asleep when all of a sudden the cry rang out: 'The bridegroom is here! Come out to meet him' (Mt 25,1-13). Like these virgins, Christian Europe has let itself be lulled; instead of living in expectancy as 'the eternal's young fiancée', it has been deceived into an unholy alliance between the world and the Kingdom of God. Christendom has thus for centuries lived in a deep night, caught in the illusion [*Sandsebedrag*] that we are all Christians. But now the 'moment' has come when the uncanny midnight cry will force Christendom out of this illusion. What is the midnight cry? On the basis of the texts from this period taken as a whole, it seems to me that the cry consists in two claims: 'Christianity does not exist within Christendom', and 'I am not a Christian'.

I am not here going to venture an interpretation of Kierkegaard's attack on Christendom. The point is neither to defend nor to criticise his final position, but to bring out the sense in which his claim 'I am

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<sup>317</sup> SV3 19, 76 / KW XXIII, 72.

not a Christian', corresponds to Nietzsche's words 'God is Dead' as an expression of a self-understanding in which the destiny of modernity is revealed, and thus to clarify the essential difference between Kierkegaardian repetition and Nietzschean recurrence.

Against the tendency of separating out Kierkegaard's final position from the rest of the authorship as its deplorable and unnecessary conclusion, I maintain Kierkegaard's own view that the sentence 'I am not a Christian' provides the point of orientation for the authorship as a whole. In 1855, for instance, he wrote of this claim: 'It is this that I must continually repeat, anyone who wants to understand my very special task must concentrate on holding this firm'.<sup>318</sup> The meaning of Kierkegaard's claim not to be a Christian appears already, if indirectly, from his literary autobiography *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* (written 1848, published posthumously). On the opening page of this book Kierkegaard sums up his meaning of his writing in the claim 'that I am and was a religious author, that my whole authorship pertains to Christianity, to the issue: becoming a Christian, with direct and indirect polemical aim at the enormous illusion: Christendom...'<sup>319</sup> But, as he argues later in that book, the problem with an illusion is that it cannot be broken directly. For the person who is in an illusion lives with a confidence and security that remains unshaken by the 'madness' of anybody who would claim that he lived in an illusory world. Thus in order to break the illusion, such a person must be approached 'from behind' by somebody who does not claim to be a Christian rather than by a person who claims to be more genuinely Christian than he is.<sup>320</sup>

However, the most decisive determination of the meaning of the sentence, 'I am not a Christian', appears in the article entitled 'My Task' in the tenth and final issue of *The Moment*. Dated September 1st, 1855, less than a month before Kierkegaard collapsed on the street in Copenhagen, this is, I believe, the last manuscript we have from his hand. What, then, was his task, according to this article? 'My task is to revise the determination: Christian', he writes.<sup>321</sup> Such revisions have taken place earlier in the history of the church, but Kierkegaard's task is different from that of earlier reformers in that he stands outside Christendom. Other reformers have assumed that they

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<sup>318</sup> SV3 19, 318 / KW XXIII, 340.

<sup>319</sup> SV3 18, 81 / KW XXII, 23.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., 95 / ibid., 43.

<sup>321</sup> SV3 19, 321 / KW XXIII, 343.

were the true Christians and that the church had gone astray, but in Kierkegaard's age, the entire Christendom has been caught in an illusion, the universality of which makes it impossible to disclose it from within. If, therefore, a professed Christian would put himself in opposition to the age by proclaiming its delusion, this would not have the power to break the spell. But if a person within Christendom would claim that he was not a Christian, and do it in such a way that it was clear that it was precisely his longing to become a Christian that made him say this, this would shake the age. For it would be sensed that the destiny of the age lies concealed in this dictum.

It is this sense of the impossibility of breaking the illusion in which Western Europe has been caught for centuries which separates Kierkegaard from the reformers of the church. 'In Christendom's eighteenth hundred years', he writes, 'there is absolutely nothing comparable, no analogy to my task; it is the first time in "Christendom"'.<sup>322</sup> The only analogy Kierkegaard allows for is that of Socrates. The compelling power of Socrates' attack on the sophists came from his insistence on his own ignorance. If he had claimed that his wisdom was greater than the sophists, they would easily have convinced themselves that this was not the case, and he certainly would not have been so dangerous for their position. Similarly, by not calling himself a Christian, Kierkegaard wants to force on the age a sense of the illusion in which it lives: that it is easy to become a Christian.

However, from this it does not follow that Kierkegaard did in fact consider himself a Christian, whereas he considered the age not to be Christian. His claim not to be a Christian was meant as genuine as Socrates' claim to be ignorant.<sup>323</sup> But, as we have seen, Socrates' ignorance was not simply a lack of knowledge, but knowledge of lacking knowledge, and thus a relation to the unknown as unknown. The same kind of reasoning seems to underlie Kierkegaard's claim. Within Christendom, 'God' has become domesticated, but the result of this domestication is that He has withdrawn. Kierkegaard's words 'I am not a Christian' are, like those of the madman, provoked by 'the smell of decomposition'; but from this he does not conclude that God is dead, but rather that it is us who have become dead for the living God.

Admittedly, Kierkegaard's and Nietzsche's words are spoken in different contexts. The people in the marketplace in 'The Madman'

<sup>322</sup> SV3 19, 322 / KW XXIII, 344.

<sup>323</sup> SV3 19, 319f. / KW XXIII, 341f.



deny that there is a God, whereas the people within Christendom assume that they are genuine Christians. But when seen against the background of the 'midnight cries' of both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, both kinds of people seem to share the confidence of the 'enlightened' world. This confidence was denied Kierkegaard and Nietzsche; against the enlightened world they embody the meaning of Jesus' words: 'If the light that is within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!' (Mt. 6: 22).

As in *Aladdin*, a doorway has opened into a treasury of unfathomable riches, and like Aladdin modernity has abandoned itself to these riches and has failed to hear the rumbling sound as the doorway closed behind it. But the 'no exit' inscribed on the back of the entrance door to the modern consciousness can be interpreted in two ways. Either there is no exit because there is no other world, or we have locked ourselves in. *Either* this inscription is the starting signal for a revolt against the oppression of an assumed other world, *or* it is a trace of a world that remains irreducibly other. On the one side of this distinction stands Nietzsche's overman who transforms everything into his own flesh and blood, on the other side stands Kierkegaard's believer whose being is determined by his relationship to the absolute other in the consciousness of sin. And between these extreme positions? Between? – But is not the problem precisely that the paths between being as a God and being nothing before God – and principally those of metaphysics – are no longer traversable? that the concluding words of *Ecce Homo* express the basic either-or that is left to those who see the crisis of modernity as it was depicted by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche:

*'Have I been understood? Dionysus over against the crucified...'*

## Conclusion

### Recollection and Repetition

In attempting to reconstruct the meaning of Kierkegaard's notion of repetition as a paradigm of modern thought, we have continually returned to the distinction between recollection and repetition. The three parts of this study have traced various forms of this distinction under the three guiding questions: in Part One, two notions of historicity were distinguished: loyalty towards the past and openness towards the future; in Part Two this distinction was further analysed as the distinction between the conception of the truth of the self as its being-a-whole or its being-for-other; and in Part Three the difference between recollection and repetition was traced back to a difference in the understanding of the meaning of becoming. By way of conclusion we shall now return to this distinction between recollection and repetition in order to attempt to indicate what, against the background of the preceding analyses, appears to be the basic difference between these two paradigms. The distinction can be approached on two levels: on one level, it expresses the difference between two modes of existing; on the other level, it expresses the difference between two paradigms of thought corresponding to the essence of antiquity and modernity. We shall briefly consider both aspects.

#### *Two Modes of Existing*

In distinguishing repetition from recollection, Constantius at the same time stressed their essential similarity in such a way that the basic difference eludes any clear conceptualization. He writes: 'Repetition and recollection are the same movement, except in opposite directions, for what is recollected has been, is repeated backwards, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forwards'.<sup>324</sup> Constantius

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<sup>324</sup> SKS 4, 9 / KW VI, 131.

thus makes 'backwards' and 'forwards' the distinguishing criteria between recollection and repetition. These designations must, of course, be understood temporally rather than spatially: A person 'repeats backwards' when he understands the present in terms of his past, and he 'recollects forwards' when he makes the meaning of his past depend on the otherness of the future. Let us consider this distinguishing criteria more closely.

'Backwards' could also be rendered 'inwards', since it denotes the directedness towards one's own past. In the backwards repetition of recollection, the otherness of the future is subjugated to the mineness of the past, and thus *internalized*. The etymology of the Danish *Erindring* (like the German *Erinnerung*) confirms this understanding of the essence of recollection as 'internalization'.<sup>325</sup> Recollection is thus a repetition in the sense that it is a *representation* in consciousness of something that is exterior to it, the repetition of other-being in the self-constancy of the thinking individual. In an early journal entry (July, 1840), Kierkegaard distinguishes two versions of the doctrine of recollection: the Platonic teaching that all knowledge is recollection, and the position of modern thought that philosophy is 'a self-reflection of what is already given in consciousness'.<sup>326</sup> Since none of these views of philosophy break the immanence of consciousness, Greek and modern philosophy both belong to the paradigm of recollection, either (in the case of the Greeks) because they assume the unity of thought and being thus excluding the possibility of genuine otherness in relation to the thinking individual, or (in the case of the modernity) because, while sensing the discordance between thought and being, it nevertheless assumes the impossibility of genuine transcendence from the realm of thought and language.

'Forwards', on the other hand, when understood temporally, could be rendered 'from the outside', for here the relation to the future as that which is genuinely new and other, is given primacy over against the relation to the past. If, therefore, 'recollection' finds the meaning of another being in the sameness of the self, 'repetition' seeks the meaning of the self in the being of the other, i.e., in the self's being

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<sup>325</sup> Undoubtedly, Kierkegaard was acquainted with the passages in Hegel in which he explored the etymological meaning of *Erinnerung* as 'internalization', e.g. in his *Philosophy of Mind* (Part Three of *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, tr. by William Wallace, Oxford 1978, p. 191 / *System der Philosophie. Dritter Teil. Die Philosophie des Geistes*, Jubiläumsausgabe Bd. 10, Stuttgart 1965, p. 311).

<sup>326</sup> Pap. III A 5 / JP 2274.

before the other. In short, whilst 'recollection' is a repetition *in* consciousness whereby the other is integrated in the self, 'repetition' is a repetition *of* consciousness, the transfiguration of the self through the relation to the other.

The connection between the concept of repetition and the notion of a new creation or a transfiguration of the self has often enough been pointed out in this study: repetition in the proper sense of the word does not apply to parts of a whole, but only to the whole as such. Genuine repetition therefore cannot be observed (for the observer would then have to occupy a place outside the change of repetition, but such a relation to something outside the change of repetition would qualify it as an improper or relative repetition). If there is repetition at all, it would have to take place in a moment in which nothing has changed, yet everything has become new. Kierkegaard suggests the Christian notion reconciliation and redemption as 'the deepest expression of repetition', since this teaching indicates the view that the truth of human existence depends on the moment when, in St. Paul's christological phrase, 'the old has passed away, [and] everything has become new' (2 Cor 5: 17).

A journal entry from the time of *Repetition* (1843) captures this basic difference between repetition and recollection as paradigms of thought and modes of existing. It reads: 'The more a person is able to forget, the more metamorphoses his life can pass through; the more he is able to remember, the more divine his life becomes'.<sup>327</sup> The connection between repetition and forgetting has been discussed earlier in this study. We have distinguished two kinds of forgetting: either forgetting is an act of consciousness or a gift to consciousness. The first kind of forgetting (represented by A's 'art of forgetting' in 'The Rotation of Crops') is a repression of the past resulting from the inability of affirming it as belonging essentially to the self. The other kind (represented by the woman who anointed Jesus) is not an activity of the self, but a redemption from the self in the confession of sin. The meaning of repetition as the gift of forgetting is linked to this redemption from oneself in the consciousness of sin and the assurance of forgiveness. In such forgetting, the self 'passes through a metamorphosis' in so far as a new beginning is given to the individual. By the faculty of recollection, on the other hand, a person integrates the parts of his own past into a whole that

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<sup>327</sup> *Pap. A 82 / JP 898.*

allows for no exteriority. The extreme point of this position is the moment when everything in one's own life and within the world as a whole has been affirmed as part of the whole of the self. Once the self by means of the powers of integration of recollection has thus freed itself from any genuine otherness it is no longer human but divine, an overman.

### *Two Paradigms of Thought*

This distinction between recollection and repetition as modes of existing reflects a paradigm shift in the history of European thought. In Greek philosophy, the structure of thought is seen as coinciding with the structure of being, hence 'all knowing is a matter of recollecting'. At the root of modernity, however, lies an experience of disintegration in which this assumed unity of thought and being is challenged. In the Greek paradigm, the individual was instructed to know himself, and thus to be his own healer; but modern man embodies a suffering that cannot be healed from within, for he no longer understands himself as being inwardly connected to a realm of eternal truth. Being thus cut off from the ground of his own being to which earlier ages took refuge, modern man stands at a crossroads: either, he must press forward down the road of recollection until he reaches the point where metaphysics disintegrates and this life is affirmed as the eternal life, as in Nietzsche's overman; or he must seek redemption in the relation to the eternal as the absolute other.

In the attempt to bring to light the essence of the distinction between repetition and recollection, I have attempted to place Kierkegaard in the context of some contemporary discussions in theology and philosophy in order to indicate the relevance of this distinction for the philosophy of religion. I shall conclude by outlining three ways in which these indications can be further pursued.

(1) Kierkegaard's interpretation of the incarnation as providing a post-metaphysical paradigm of thought suggests a comparison, not only to theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann and J.B. Metz who, in different ways, attempt to dehellinize theology, but also, and more importantly perhaps, to a philosopher such as Michael Theunissen who somehow seems to attempt to make Christian eschatology the basis of philosophical discourse (rather than making it the distinguishing mark of theology over against philosophy).

(2) As a diagnostician of modernity, Kierkegaard provides a radical alternative to e.g. the view of nihilism expressed in Nietzsche and the existentialist tradition. Instead of understanding the crisis of modernity in terms of a devaluation of the highest values, Kierkegaard sees it as the isolation or self-imprisonment resulting from a disengagement from the relationship to the eternal other that constitutes the truth of the self. This crisis, therefore, is not the end of religion, but, in some sense, the condition for the genuine appropriation of the salvation for sinners proclaimed in Christianity. This suggests a comparison to, for instance, George Pattison's attempt to see the event of nihilism as providing the basis of a new, non-christological kind of religion in *Agnosis: Theology in the Void*.

(3) Kierkegaard, as a thinker of otherness and difference, invites a comparison with thinkers such as Lévinas and Derrida. In Kierkegaard, however, the notion of the other does not serve to open anew the horizon of possibilities that seems gradually to have been closed in the history of metaphysics, but to expose the need of salvation that underlies this tradition. For, as I have argued, in Kierkegaard, the handle of the door to the other is placed on the outside. During the process of working with Kierkegaard, it has seemed to me that what most profoundly sets him apart from mainstream modern and post-modern thought is not his existential analysis, but the presupposition of this analysis; not, however, the *concept* of sin which he employs as a heuristic means in his analysis of the age, but the *consciousness* of sin which is always present only as a limit-concept in these analyses.



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